

FAMILIES TORN APART: HUMAN RIGHTS AND U.S. RESTRICTIONS ON CUBAN-AMERICAN TRAVEL

HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND OVERSIGHT OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS SECOND SESSION

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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2008

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS,
HUMAN RIGHTS, AND OVERSIGHT,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:10 a.m. in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, the Honorable William Delahunt (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. DELAHUNT. This hearing will come to order.

I want to apologize particularly to my colleagues for my tardiness. It is my intention this morning to make my statement and then go to my friend from California for his statement, and then go to the panel, and obviously understanding that other members of the committee will be coming in and out, depending on their schedules, and allow them to make their remarks as they come, and then we will go to the second panel.

Last year Mr. LaHood, Ms. Emerson, our full committee chair, Howard Berman, Mr. Flake, Mr. Meeks, and Dr. Ron Paul joined me in introducing “The Cuban-American Family Rights Restoration Act,” H.R. 757.

This bill would allow American citizens and permanent residents with relatives in Cuba to travel whenever they want—without having to get permission from our own Government. It would allow them to carry any remittances in any amount to give to their families. And it would prohibit the President from imposing any restrictions on family travel.

We introduced this bill to eliminate restrictions imposed by the Bush administration in 2004. Until then, Cuban-Americans could effectively travel to Cuba whenever they wanted—if the purpose was to visit family. These family visits were critical for Cubans on the island. Their relatives brought money, medicine, clothes, and humanitarian supplies. But they were just as important for Cuban-Americans. Because these visits allowed them to fulfill the most basic of human impulses—being with family. These trips were a very clear and unequivocal statement by Cuban-Americans that they did not want politics to trump family.

But in 2004, new restrictions were imposed on Cuban-Americans. The word “family” was redefined to exclude aunts and uncles and cousins. And now Cuban-Americans can only travel to Cuba if they

get permission from our Government. Even worse, they can only go once every 3 years, and there are no humanitarian exemptions. Not even to care for a terminally ill parent or child. Not even for a death in the family. Let me repeat that: No humanitarian exemptions whatsoever. I would hope that we all could agree that that is particularly cruel and, from my perspective, morally repugnant.

But this is not really just about Cuba policy, a policy that I would submit has been an abysmal failure; a policy that has reduced American influence on the island to almost nothing even as changes are occurring. It is as if there is a new embargo, an embargo on American influence in Cuba.

For these particular restrictions—that specifically target families—make it something much more than just policy for it is about truly family values, American values, if you will. It is about who we are and what we stand for. It is not about Fidel or Raul Castro. We know who they are, and we know what they stand for.

The callous nature of these restrictions was bluntly stated by one of the policy's authors in response to a question by Congresswoman Emerson who had concerns about these new restrictions. Here is what he had to say to her, and I was present along, I think, with Representative Flake, "An individual can decide when they want to travel once every 3 years and the decision is up to them. So if they have a dying relative, they have to figure out when they want to travel." Those are his words.

I would ask all of us to reflect on that statement for a moment. Do you want to visit your terminally ill mother on her deathbed or attend her funeral? Pick one because you cannot do both. And God help you if your mother and father die within 3 years of each other. Just imagine having to decide which funeral you are going to attend.

I would suggest that these restrictions are stunning in their lack of humanity. I believe they are anti-family and un-American, and they only magnify the pain and the anguish and the heartaches that families torn apart by political ideology must endure and suffer.

The fact is that Cuban-Americans are the victims of a pernicious, political discrimination. No other community in the United States is punished like this because of hostility between governments. Not Iranian-Americans, not Korean-Americans, not Americans with families in Burma, Uzbekistan or Zimbabwe—just Cuban-Americans.

According to a recent report in the Miami Herald, one of our witnesses here today—Ms. Ninoska Pérez Castellón—I hope I am pronouncing that correctly—said Cuban-Americans who are worried about their relatives should consider the greater good. "There are 11 million people under the same conditions. What we should be looking for are ways to benefit the 11 million people." I agree. I agree.

"And not think of what we can do for our own relatives," she went on.

I cannot disagree more. I cannot disagree more. If we take care of our families, everyone benefits. The community at large will benefit. And as the El Nuevo Herald editorialized this week, "Free men do not make policy with other people's pain."

The tragedy of these restrictions exclusively targeted at Cuban-Americans is underscored and amplified by the devastation wrought by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The Red Cross's early estimate of total damage is in the neighborhood of \$4 billion, some 2.5 million Cubans had to be evacuated. Another of today's witnesses, Mr. Ignacio Sosa, opined that the damage to Cuba's economy from Gustav alone will exceed that which the United States suffered after Katrina and Rita combined. What we have is a disaster of epic proportions.

And yet, these Bush administration restrictions complicate the natural generosity of Americans, particularly Cuban-Americans who are well known for their compassion, and at a time when their families are desperate for both material and emotional support—the opportunity to see and talk and embrace each other. These restrictions are prohibiting American citizens from helping their families in Cuba.

That is why I am filing new legislation later on today with Mr. Flake, Ms. DeLauro, Mr. McGovern, Ms. Emerson, Mr. LaHood, and Dr. Paul, and others, that would lift for 6 months the limits on family travel and remittances, and care packages. I want to be very clear: I still believe that these restrictions should be eliminated entirely. But I am willing to compromise in an effort to avoid a humanitarian disaster.

If we fail to act, we are not simply going to be accused of double standards—remember just yesterday this committee approved a down payment for \$1 billion to a repressive regime in Georgia for humanitarian relief—\$1 billion. But more importantly from my perspective, and I know it is shared by some, we will have betrayed those American ideals that make us unique among the family of nations.

Now let me turn to my good friend and ranking member, Dana Rohrabacher, for any comments he wishes to make. Dana.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes, thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, without objection, I would like to ask the record be kept open for a week to allow for statements from additional witnesses to be submitted for the record.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Without objection.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And specifically, Mr. Chairman, I would like to note that one of our minority witnesses, Armando Valladares, who served 22 years in Castro's jails as a political prisoner and an Amnesty International prisoner of conscious, was delayed in Ecuador where he is seeking the release of a prisoner of conscious there, and has just established a branch of his human rights foundation and he is unable to join us today. I ask that his statement be made part of the record.

[The information referred to follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ARMANDO VALLADARES, CHAIRMAN,
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL, HUMAN RIGHTS FOUNDATION

RESTRICTIONS ON TRAVEL AND REMITTANCES TO CUBA MUST REMAIN

Sending money to Cuba only serves to prolong the tyranny of the Castro regime. Hundreds of millions of dollars arrive every year to the island from the Cuban exile community. Certainly this money is meant to help their families, however it can only be used on the black market or to shop in stores where dollars are accepted. No matter what though, in the end, this money will end up in the hands of the re-

gime. It is painfully difficult to have to tell a family member that you cannot send them money. My father was a political prisoner in Cuba. Yet, he insisted I not send him material support because this would have contributed to maintaining the tyrannical regime. If we act according to our sentimentality, we can be sure that every dollar that reaches Cuba will prolong the life of the regime. It is not sent with this intention, but the reality is that it is financing the terror and oppression.

The Communists have successfully exploited the sentiments of the Cuban exile community, and those who defend the Cuban regime, of which there are many in the U.S. Congress. However, those who claim these feelings of "compassion" for the Cuban people, did not have these same feelings when it was the people of South Africa or Chile or Haiti who were suffering oppression. In the case of those countries, the individuals who want to lift the commercial sanctions on Cuba now, demanded maintaining the same types of commercial sanctions then, as a passive form of pressuring the dictators of those people to make concessions on issues of human rights and freedom. With the dictatorships of South Africa, Chile and Haiti—it was the same. When you treat Cuba differently, with a double standard and do not apply the same conditions, it is racist and discriminatory. It is devoid of ethics because it shows that you consider Cubans to be in a third category, a category that does not deserve the international solidarity that the people of South Africa, Chile and Haiti received in their times of suffering.

To take advantage of the tragedy left by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in my homeland of Cuba is a sign of those who, with hurricanes or without, continue to work to appease the dictatorship, to support it. It is not necessary to lift any restrictions to send humanitarian assistance to Cuba. The regime of Cuba is the one who refuses to receive this help. The leaders of the Communist Party, those whose houses remain in tact, those who yearn for nothing and live without limitations, these are the ones who reject the help for the Cuban people in need. It is the Cuban regime that asks for the sanctions to be lifted, the restrictions that allow help from the United States and international organizations to go directly to the Cuban people.

The repression, the political persecution, has increased. The abuse of political prisoners is more degrading each time, and instead of renouncing the dictatorship for these actions, there are those who want to give in to their demands so that the regime may continue its repression. Those who propose this are blind to half a century of tyranny and do not care that their political agendas directly contribute to the suffering of the Cuban people.

Mr. ROHRBACHER. And as you know, Mr. Valladares' memoir of his time in the Cuban gulag against all hope was an international best seller, and I am proud to say that my former boss, President Reagan, appointed him as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights where he represented our nation and the interests of freedom-loving people everywhere, and I am honored that Blanca González has agreed to appear on such short notice to offer testimony when Mr. Valladares was able to.

Now with that said just a little bit about the subject matter today, and I am looking forward to the testimony and to some frank discussion about the nature of our relationship with Cuba and the nature of the Cuban Government. I disagree with you, Mr. Chairman, in just about everything you just said, and this has nothing to do with the families and has everything to do with the nature of the Cuban Government.

We do not have this problem with people who want to go to Brazil or other countries in Latin America. Why is that? Well, that is because we are not against families, we are against a Communist dictatorship that hates the United States so much that it has agreed to do anything it could to hurt us.

Years ago, of course, Fidel Castro hated our country so much that he agreed to put nuclear-armed missiles in his country, and then when the Soviet Union put those missiles in the country, Fidel Castro argued that they use them, which would have precipitated a mass slaughter of Americans.

Now, we have a regime headed by Castro and now is handed off to his brother. That shows you what a wonderful dictatorship of the proletariat is all about. I mean, it is just like feudalism, and father to son, and we have problems here in our country too. I do not necessarily support that either. But the fact is that Fidel Castro, and I am anxious to hear the details about some of the things that we may not be aware of; for example, the vast wealth of Fidel Castro. Where did the vast wealth come from? I mean, we talk about here, my goodness, the families cannot come and help their families when they are in trouble. Well, that is not because of anything except Fidel Castro.

Number one, is the totalitarian anti-American regime that he has. If he did not long for that power, keep that power in his hands, that problem would be dissolved. But not only that, but why is there such a need for families in Cuba to need help from their families that have left for the United States? Because Fidel Castro has raped that country. Fidel Castro is a man of vast wealth, and where did he get it? Came right out of the hide of his people.

If we are going to make things better, we have to be realistic. We want things to be better. Fidel Castro and his regime not only keeps political prisoners but every time anybody decides to cite something and express some displeasure over the corruption and repression in Cuba they are targeted by gangs of thugs who go to their home and beat them up, and beat their families up. This right out of Nazi Germany, and that still happens to this day, and to this day Fidel Castro still has what they call a block spy system.

You know what a block spy system is? That is where every block has a spy who makes sure that they report on anything you do if it is out of the ordinary.

No. Cuba's problems are not caused by United States policy. Cuba's problems are caused by Fidel Castro's dictatorship, and we should do everything to eliminate those problems by eliminating that dictatorship and helping the people of Cuba have a democratic government.

I remember during the days when Saddam Hussein was still in power. I remember when there was this great outcry among my friends, who I happen to disagree with, but are still my friends and colleagues, blaming the United States for the fact that the little children of Iraq did not have medicine even though we fully understood that we had reached an agreement with Saddam Hussein to make sure he had enough revenue to provide for all the needs of his children. But what was he doing? We know now he was squandering all of that money on weapons.

So who is to blame? The United States of America or Saddam Hussein?

No. What we want to do is make this a better world by making sure that regimes like the old Soviet Union collapse, which they have, and we do not—we do not make it a better world by treating a Communist dictatorship with all of the evil that that represents as if it was a government like in Belgium, or in Brazil, or in other democratic government.

No, we should treat that government differently, and we should seek to try to help those people who want to bring democracy. Changing our rules to try to treat them the same way we do any

other country is not going to bring about more freedom or a change in the condition of the Cuban people.

So with that said, I am looking forward to the testimony today, and thank you for calling this hearing.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I thank my friend from California.

Now let me introduce our first panel. I know they have schedules that are frenetic, and they have other commitments but they are three outstanding members of the House of Representatives.

Representative Jo Ann Emerson has represented the Eighth Congressional District in Congress since 1996 under the principle of putting people before politics. In Washington, DC, she is a high-profile leader on agriculture, energy, health care and other issues that disproportionately affect Americans in rural parts of the country.

From her position on the House Appropriations Committee, she conducts oversight on the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Department of Energy, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of the Interior.

I am going to cut short because I know she is anxious to give her testimony. Let me just simply say she is an outstanding Member of Congress and a dear friend.

Let me now go to—well, let me go to Ray LaHood and introduce him. Ray is serving his seventh term, representing the Eighteenth District in Illinois. Over the years Congressman LaHood has been lauded by many for his leadership at the local, state and national levels, and I can say this with candor and honestly. He is widely viewed as someone who has a deep respect for the institution of Congress and who works across party lines on issues that are of a priority to the American people. He is a leader in terms of efforts to establish a higher level of civility, decorum, and bipartisanship in the House. And let me just say this: He is retiring voluntarily at the end of this term. He was elected with around 70 percent of the vote in his last election. He is an individual who has made a superb contribution to this institution, to this country, and I know I speak for all of the Democrats, Ray, you are going to be sorely missed.

Now, last but not least, we have Representative Thaddeus McCotter who was first elected in Congress in 2002 to represent the citizens of western Oakland and western Wayne counties.

He, too, is a superb Member, well respected in the Republican Conference, and serves as chairman of House Republican Policy Committee, and I think that is a position that was once held by Vice President Cheney. Is that true, Representative?

Mr. MCCOTTER. I understand you are a great admirer of his.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I know the gentleman. He is also a member of the House Financial Services Committee where he serves on the capital markets, insurance and government-sponsored enterprises in the housing and community opportunity committees. Welcome, Thad.

I think we will begin with Congresswoman Emerson. We will then go to Congressman McCotter and we will wrap it up with our friend from Illinois, Mr. LaHood. Jo Ann.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JO ANN EMERSON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MISSOURI

Ms. EMERSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I also want to thank Ranking Member Rohrabacher for allowing me to speak before the committee today to discuss an issue of great importance to so very many Cuban-Americans, and that is the ability to travel and visit their families in Cuba.

However, before I begin my formal remarks, I want to make a response, if I could, to Ranking Member Rohrabacher's comments about the fact that this is really not about travel, but rather about the Government of Cuba. I am sorry, sir. That is not correct. The fact is those people who oppose the policy of allowing Cuban-Americans more frequent travel to their home country always make an argument about the Castro brothers, and never understand the human value of this.

And when Chairman Delahunt mentioned the discussion with the State Department folks and the Treasury folks that we had, and my question about going to visit one's family and having to decide between going to see them on their deathbed or going to their funeral, the statement was that the intent of Congress makes this policy that we are now changing—well, the intent of Congress since I happen to be one of the authors of the TESRA bill that changed the law to allow us to have a little bit more contact and a little bit of trade, that was not the intent of Congress, and I just have to point that out because I just want you to reflect upon the fact that, yes, if this happened in North Korea, yes, if this happened in Iran, guess what? Americans could go visit their families. You just cannot do it in Cuba, and it is unconscionable, and I feel very, very strongly about that.

I want to really share a story, if I could, about a friend of mine whose name is Carlos Lazo, and he is a Cuban-American who came to the United States in 1991 on a raft. I met him in the spring of 2005, after he had completed a tour of duty in Operation Iraqi Freedom. At that time, Carlos had two sons living in Cuba and he was also a sergeant in the Washington State National Guard.

He visited his sons back in 2004, before he was going to be deployed, and I can tell you that as a mother of two soldiers who have served in Iraq, and one will be going back again, I really can certainly sympathize with the strong desire of any family member to be able to spend time with their sons and/or daughters, spouses, grandparents, aunts or uncles, prior to deployment. There is nothing more important.

And let me say too that during his R&R in 2004, June, Carlos actually sought to visit his family and travel from the Middle East to Miami with the intention of flying on to Havana as he had always done, and I can empathize. But you know, I was fortunate to be able to spend time with my children before they left for Iraq.

Unfortunately, when Carlos got back and wanted to go visit his sons, he was informed by our Government at the Miami Airport, oh, that our Government had imposed new restrictions which not only redefined who family was but also prevented him from being able to visit his sons; to prevent a father from being able to visit his sons.

So after being denied the right to visit, Carlos then returned to the battlefield where once again he served our country with so much honor, received the Bronze Star for his valor at the Battle of Fallujah. He continues to serve in the Washington State National Guard, and has an unshakable love for the country he risked so much to get to, and then again he risked his life to defend it.

While Carlos's story is in many ways unique, ultimately it really is all too common. Every day a significant event occurs in the life of a Cuban or a Cuban-American family—a birth, an illness, a wedding or a death, and the restrictions now prevent those families from sharing the moments when they most need to be together.

Mr. Rohrabacher, I ask, what would happen, how would you feel if you could not see your triplets? How would you feel if you were not able to see them?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Should I answer the question? I would say that if I did not see my triplets and it meant freedom in my country, and so that other people in the future would be free, and young people would be free, that would be more important, yes.

Ms. EMERSON. I guess I am a mom and I feel differently about it, and I think that 40 years of the same policy and nothing changes. It does not matter. You have got to see—you know, some people live and die for children.

Anyway, during all of these times, I think it is irresponsible, reprehensible that Cuban-Americans would not be able to share in these joys. You know, family is really one of life's unique blessings, and I would like to quote Desmond Tutu who said, "You don't choose your family, they are God's gift to you as you are to them." And, unfortunately, the Code of Federal Regulations has chosen who can be a Cuban-American's family and rations out that gift in 3-year intervals.

Congress is not without the ability to change these policies. At present, there is language included in the Fiscal Year 2009 Financial Services Appropriations bill which would extend the definition of a member of a person's immediate family to include an aunt, uncle, a niece, a nephew or first cousin, and it would also decrease the amount of time between travel. I am very pleased, as Chairman Delahunt mentioned, that he has again introduced stand-alone legislation which would restore the rights of Cuban-American citizens to travel to Cuba. A more ideal situation would not require annual action.

As I mentioned and having spoken to so many Cuban-American families both within and without and outside of Cuba, there are a lot of joys and a lot of hardships that they are not able to properly respond to. Obviously, the ongoing trauma that Hurricanes Gustav and Ike inflicted on the Cuban people can now be added to the long list of life-changing events. When a hurricane strikes in the United States the outpouring of assistance to relief organizations is overwhelming. Our nations, our communities, our people, and our families, they come together and respond to this scale of tragedy. Americans will risk their health, safety, and property to look these loved ones in the eye, hug them, and help start the healing process.

I have been told or we all have been told that more than 500,000 houses have been damaged in Cuba, 90,000 homes completely destroyed, and as Mr. Delahunt said, damages in the billions of dol-

lars. Those of us blessed with family members would surely agree with Archbishop Tutu that they are gifts of God, and the governments should not separate them, not during a time of joy, a time of hardship, certainly not during a time of crisis.

With that, I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I am ready to take any questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Emerson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JO ANN EMERSON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MISSOURI

Chairman Delahunt and Ranking Member Rohrabacher, thank you for the invitation to join the Committee today and discuss an issue of great importance to many Cuban-Americans—the ability to travel and visit their families in Cuba.

The decision to separate families—a decision that is truly unfortunate and sad—is one that Congress must take a more active role in reviewing. I believe a reasonable examination of the family travel restrictions, and in particular the tightening of the restrictions in 2004, will show that they have done little to impact the Cuban regime while continuing the separation of Cuban-Americans from their families in Cuba.

I would like to share with you the story of a friend of mine—Carlos Lazo, a Cuban-American who came to this country on a raft. I met Carlos in the spring of 2005 after he had completed a tour of duty in Operation Iraqi Freedom. At the time, Carlos had two sons still living there; Carlos was also a sergeant in the Washington State National Guard.

Prior to his brigade's deployment in 2004, Carlos had visited his sons in Cuba frequently.

As a mother of two soldiers who have been deployed to Iraq, I can certainly sympathize with the strong desire to spend time with family that Carlos felt before his deployment. During his R&R, in June 2004, Carlos again sought to visit his family and travelled from the Middle East to Miami with the intention of flying on to Havana.

Again I can empathize; however, this is where our experiences differed. When my stepson arrived home for R&R, his family was waiting; when Carlos arrived in America, he was informed that our government had imposed new restrictions which not only redefined who was family but that also prevented the ability of this father to visit his sons.

After being denied the right to see his sons, Carlos then returned to the battlefield, where he served our country honorably, receiving the Bronze Star for his valor at the Battle of Fallujah. He continues to serve in the Washington State National Guard and has an unshakeable love for the country he risked so much to get to and then risked his life to defend.

While Carlos's story is in many ways unique, ultimately, it is all too common. Everyday, a significant event occurs in the life of a Cuban or a Cuban-American family: a birth, an illness, a wedding or a death—and these restrictions prevent those families from sharing the moments when they most need to be together. Times of celebration and mourning, worries and reliefs—all the joys and burdens of life which only family share—are made less joyful or more difficult by the Code of Federal Regulations.

Family is one of life's unique blessings. To quote Desmond Tutu: "You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them." Unfortunately, the Code of Federal Regulations has chosen who can be a Cuban-American's family and rations out that "gift" in three year intervals.

Congress however, is not without the ability to change these policies. At present, language is included in the Fiscal Year 2009 Financial Services Appropriations bill which would extend the definition of a "member of a person's immediate family" to include an: aunt, uncle, niece, nephew or first cousin. This Appropriations bill would also decrease the amount of time between travel. Chairman Delahunt, as this Committee is well aware, has introduced stand-alone legislation, H.R. 757, which would restore the rights of Cuban-American citizens to travel to Cuba—a more ideal solution which would not require annual action.

As I mentioned earlier there are many joys and hardships for which Cuban-Americans cannot properly respond. The ongoing trauma Hurricanes Gustav and Ike inflicted on the Cuban people can now be added to the long list of life changing events. When a hurricane strikes in the United States the outpouring of assistance to relief organizations is overwhelming. Our nation, our communities and most importantly

our families come together to respond to this scale of tragedy. Americans will risk their health, safety and property to look these loved ones in the eye, hug them, and help start the healing process. I am told more than 500,000 houses have been damaged in Cuba, 90,000 homes completely destroyed; and that the damage is in the billion of dollars.

Those of us blessed with family members would surely agree with Archbishop Tutu: they are gifts from God; our Government should not separate them—not during a time of joy, a time of hardship, and certainly not during a time of crisis.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you, Representative Emerson, and now we will go to Representative McCotter.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE THADDEUS G. MCCOTTER, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MICHIGAN

Mr. MCCOTTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for allowing me to testify. In the interest of your time, I will associate myself with the introductory remarks of Mr. Rohrabacher regarding the intrinsically evil nature of the Communist Cuban Government. I will also stipulate to the noble intentions of everyone in this room, everyone on this committee, everyone on this panel. Your compassion is historic and it is duly noted.

Unfortunately, your compassion is what the butchers bet on. History abounds with such cynically cruel incidents of people like the Castro regime, using every effort by people of good will, for whatever reason, to turn them into weapons to be used for the oppression of the Cuban people. What we must recognize is how in the hands of this evil Castro regime every concession becomes a weapon. Thus, we should recognize one elementary fact. Castro could lift any embargo in a heartbeat. He could allow his people to be free, and then the trade and the reciprocity and the family reunions could occur.

But thus far it is difficult, even under such difficult circumstances as the Cuban people find themselves. We must not reward Communist intransigents for this is not how we feel about us. It is about freedom for Cubans. Of course, this issue can be about us for no matter how noble our intentions if we betray the oppressed Cuban people and compel Castro's political prisoners to peer through their bars to behold our beacon of liberty vanish across scant miles of sea, it will be about us and about our abject failure to champion human freedom.

Thank you.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you, Ted, and now last on this panel, our friend Congressman Ray LaHood. Ray.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE RAY LAHOOD, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

Mr. LAHOOD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding this hearing, and thank you for your kind comments about our service in the House. I appreciate that very much and I appreciate the time that you and I have spent working on other legislation that ultimately became law. It took us 5 years to accomplish that, and I know that you all will be working for an extended period of time beyond this to accomplish our goal to allow family members and others to visit Cuba.

I want to illustrate something that I have been involved with during the time that I came to Congress in 1995. Our Government had a travel ban on Lebanon. My grandparents came to this country, actually came to Peoria in 1895, what was then Syria, now is Lebanon. And so I decided to take a great deal of interest in the country of Lebanon, and the reason that I mention this is that there was a travel ban in 1995 by our country on Lebanese-Americans traveling to visit family members and others.

So I decided to go to Lebanon myself, and as is the case with Cuba, Members of Congress can go to Cuba but family members cannot. Members of Congress could go to Lebanon, which I did, and I have been there now 13 times out of the 14 years I have been in Congress, and while the travel restriction was on, Members of Congress could travel to Lebanon. And when I got there what I found was a very peace-loving country, even though Syria had influence, even though Hezbollah had influence south of Beirut in the southern part of the country.

What I found was that even though there were influences of terrorists and terrorist governments from outside the country, it was a pretty safe place to be, and I found no threat to myself or to others that were visiting there, and over a period of time working with President Clinton's team, then Secretary of State Christopher, and then Secretary Albright, over a period of time we were able to make the case that we were not going to have any great influence on Lebanon's ability to be a good upstanding country and the people there by prohibiting family members from traveling there, and over time we were able to persuade the Clinton administration, ultimately Secretary Albright, and President Clinton to lift the travel ban.

My point in using that illustration is how do we hurt Castro by inhibiting family members traveling there to visit their loved ones? How does that hurt him? And by the way, folks, Fidel Castro is no longer in charge of the country, and my point is we are not hurting him, but we are hurting the ability of family members to travel there.

I had a young woman in my office recently, about a year ago, whose family was from Iraq, and she was a visiting student, and she was going to take leave from my office and live in Iraq for a summer, and she did that, and my point is even though we have great difficulty with—and this was the time during which Saddam was the leader—she was able to go there, she was safe, she was able to visit family members.

What good does it do for us to have a policy that in no way inhibits Castro or his family or other leaders in the country from doing whatever they want to do by the inability of family members to go there and visit? It is an antiquated policy. It is an outdated policy.

Our job as legislators is to look at problems and to look at policies that simply do not make sense in the real world. We are in the twenty-first century, and we live in a very small world, and you know what this is all about. This is about presidential politics and it is about politics in southern Florida, and my hope is that whoever gets elected President, whether it is Senator McCain or Senator Obama, they will do the same thing that President Nixon did when he made a trip to China. Maybe one of them will make a trip

to Cuba, and reach out. If we are not talking to people, we are never going to have the ability to work out our differences or work out what we believe are the opportunities to engage these people.

You look what has happened all around the world where we have engaged governments that we did not like, we did not agree with their policies, and the idea that restricting family members is somehow going to hurt Castro is nonsense and everybody in this room knows that. It does not affect him one bit, or his regime. What it does do is send a pretty loud message that we are very insensitive to the people, very insensitive to the people who really want to visit family members, really want to have opportunities to go back and visit their homeland. This is an outdated, antiquated law, and it should be changed, and I am happy to be one of the original co-sponsors of your bill, Mr. Chairman, that will begin to open the door and open a pathway like we did in Lebanon, and it took us a long time to do it. So keep up the fight, and eventually this policy will be changed and the loved ones of those who want to visit will be able to do that, and lots of other opportunities will begin to happen.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. LaHood follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE RAY LAHOOD, A REPRESENTATIVE IN
CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Cuban travel ban.

For over 40 years, it has been illegal for U.S. citizens to travel to the island of Cuba. The penalty for not abiding by these restrictions often results in paying a hefty fine of over \$7,000.

Travel restrictions were put into place over several years with new restrictions being added piece by piece. The first restrictions put into place back in 1960 restricted most exports to Cuba. In 1962, President Kennedy banned travel by prohibiting transactions with Cuba. While travel was temporarily permitted during the Carter administration, the travel ban and other prohibitions were renewed in 1982. Then, in 1994, the Clinton administration added more restrictions on family travel, prohibiting family from visiting without being granted a license to travel for the purposes of extreme family hardship involving humanitarian need. Today, Cuban-Americans are only able to visit Cuba once every three years for no more than 14 days, and they are only able to visit immediate family members.

Just as these restrictions were put into place piece by piece, they can be removed in a similar manner. Allowing family travel restrictions to be eased or removed is the first and most important step in this process.

As a member of the Cuba Working Group, I have continuously supported measures introduced in Congress to limit the restrictions on travel to Cuba. America's support for democracy in Latin America, a region that is now more democratic than at any time in history, has been augmented over time by close person-to-person contact and exchanges. The one exception to democracy in the region is Cuba, where the United States continues to maintain a policy of isolation. By lifting the current restrictions, many U.S. citizens could travel to Cuba and engage in conversations with the people of Cuba. This would undermine the Cuban government's strict control and manipulation of information and, in effect, weaken totalitarian control over Cuba, as American ideas and values could finally penetrate the Cuban borders.

If the ultimate goal is to promote democracy, public participation in government, and freedom of speech and expression, how is it beneficial to prevent Cuban citizens from being exposed to American citizens who hold such beliefs and ideals? Family members, Cuban-American citizens, who are culturally tied to both the United States and Cuba would be the best emissaries to achieve this goal; to help the country incorporate democracy into its political landscape while also preserving its ethnic identity.

When I came to Congress 13 years ago, there was a travel ban for people to travel to Lebanon, and I worked very hard with the Clinton administration to get that ban lifted. It has been lifted, and look at the kind of relationship we have with Lebanon

now. There are vast differences in our political and social interaction with Lebanon from the time the ban was lifted in July 1997 to today. Business investment in Lebanon has increased. While conflicts with Hezbollah remain a significant factor in Lebanese politics, the overall democratic institutions are solid. Interactions between our United States Congress and the Lebanese Parliament are also strong.

I understand the arguments of those who oppose lifting the travel ban to Cuba. There is concern that additional tourism dollars resulting from increased travel to Cuba could promote the very regime that is oppressing Cuban citizens. However, in our attempts to subvert oppression, we are contributing to the problem. We are punishing those we are intending to help by keeping this ban in place. Families are being torn apart and limited in their ability to assist each other in times of need. The occurrences are not a direct result of the Cuban government, but of our own.

This policy, which aims to deny hard currency earnings to the Cuban government, may have made sense when Cuba and the Soviet Union were threatening countries in this hemisphere, but it makes no sense today when Cuba poses no significant national security threat, and many Cold War travel restrictions to other parts of the world have already been abolished. When you have a country 90 miles off our border, we ought to have a strong relationship with them, whether we like or dislike, agree or disagree with the government there. There are many governments that we disagree with politically, but we allow people to come back and forth, and we allow people to have the opportunity to be with their families.

Removing the travel ban to Cuba is a policy decision that would be a benefit to our country. Travel, and person-to person interactions will increase positive relations between our nations. This course of action will allow many of our own citizens to travel to see family without (or with limited) restrictions. If we do not have communication with the people of Cuba and we do not allow families to travel back and forth and to have the interaction with one another, we are never going to bridge this gap. The way you bridge it is to allow this kind of travel and opportunities for family, and at that point, then, I think we will have taken a significant step in the right direction.

Thank you once again for allowing me to address this important matter.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you, Ray, and I am going to ask the panel if they have any questions of the remaining two members. I call on Congressman Ron Paul.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Chairman, I do not exactly have a question. I would like to make a comment, and then ask them if they want to respond if I could.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Of course.

Mr. PAUL. But first off, I want to thank you for holding these hearings. I think they are very important, and I know you have made an effort to be fair and balanced, and you had both sides expressed here before the committee.

Mr. DELAHUNT. If the gentleman would yield for a moment, I want to really underscore that the three Members of Congress that are testifying here today are all Republican. So I do not want it reported somewhere that this is a partisan issue. This is not a partisan issue. Please proceed.

Mr. PAUL. But I would like to contribute more to this effort to be fair and balanced, and tell you that I agree with every single thing you said in your opening statement, but I would just like to make a comment, you know, about this whole issue, so I was delighted to hear the testimony.

But the ranking member made some very strong points, and I, of course, am on the other side of that issue, but I would agree with his good intentions, but I would like to remind him also that when one is set on a road of good intentions on just where that usually leads us, and the good intentions will not work. It is so clearly evident that sanctions do not work, and the unintended consequences are so important.

I think people who are frightened about reaching out, I think they are insecure with their own beliefs, and I think there is a lack of confidence that trade and freedom works, and I think the Chinese example is perfect because they were ruthless, but now they are more capitalistic than we are. Sure, they are way imperfect, but they are our banker. And what are we doing? We are socializing our industries.

Mr. DELAHUNT. If the gentleman would yield for a moment. What we are doing is we are borrowing from the Chinese, that is what we are doing, and I am—

Mr. PAUL. Yes, we are borrowing, they have become our banker. But think of what the efforts were made when we were going to take on the Communists of Vietnam, fighting and dying with the French for 20 years, and all of a sudden we give up on that approach, and we trade with them. Their President comes here. We talk to them. The founders were right about this issue, they emphasize this. We should trade with people, be friends with people. You will never find another perfect nation. If we see imperfection in the world, our obligation is within our own selves, and within our own country.

But this reaching out, to me, is so, so important that we do this, and this whole idea that punishing the people of Cuba. This is what we are doing. And the chairman was right about the humanitarian approach. Most of the time people think about extending humanitarian aid. All right, we feel sorry for people. Let us appropriate \$1 billion or \$10 billion, on and on, at the same time here is something, we remove government restrictions that emphasizes the humanitarian approach. So this, to me, is so crucial. If you believe in liberty, if you believe in freedom, if you have confidence, you should not be intimidating and say no, what we want to do is confront and intimidate.

Castro, Castro is past tense. He is gone. I mean, he is gone from the scene. We should be worrying about what we are doing on the eastern side of the island. That is what we ought to be worrying about rather than the serious problems that Castro caused.

So I want to thank the chairman for these hearings and I appreciate very much this opportunity, and I would see if anybody wants to make a comment.

Ms. EMERSON. May I make a comment, please, Mr. Chairman? Thank you very much, Mr. Paul.

First of all, let me say that none of us, and I believe I can speak for Ray as well, none of us are saying that the Castro brothers are good people. I mean, there are definite human rights abuses. There are definite problems and the lack of freedom in many cases for the people in Cuba, and there is no question about that.

But all we are doing, number one, is giving now Raul Castro, formerly Fidel Castro, an excuse to beat up on America, an excuse me make us look bad in the eyes of every Cuban person who lives on the island, and I think all of us know, as Ray pointed out, as you all mentioned, that face-to-face contact, visits, educational visits and the like, that is the very best ambassador for democracy that I can think of. It certainly has worked with other regimes, and I still—I do want to point out once again that in my opinion there is no difference, no difference between the human rights violations

imposed by Fidel Castro or even perhaps Raul Castro and those by Kim Jung Il in North Korea, and in Iran by Ahmadinejad and others. There is no difference.

So we cannot have a double standard. Well, we can. We obviously do have a double standard, but it makes us look like hypocrites.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Paul.

Mr. PAUL. Could I ask for 30 seconds more, please?

Mr. DELAHUNT. Sure.

Mr. PAUL. Okay. I would like to make one point. During the Presidential election campaign, we had a debate in Florida, and I brought up our position that we should be more open, and the crowd was made up of mostly people 50 and older, and I was booed and hissed. But later on I had a luncheon with young Cuban-Americans, and they loudly cheered. That is the future. The past is this old approach that has failed for 40 years. So that was a real experience for me.

Ms. EMERSON. Let me just point out that having a meeting just earlier in the week with a person who lives in Miami who has worked very hard with the community at large, tells me that because of—in the aftermath of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike—that the entire Cuban-American community, the most conservative, the most liberal toward other kinds of relations with Cuba, have all come together because they realize the desperate need of the Cuban people in the aftermath of these two terrible tragedies.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Congressman Flake.

Mr. FLAKE. I just want to thank the witnesses. I know that as long as I have been in Congress both of them have worked on this issue, and worked very hard on this issue, particular with Congressman LaHood retiring. I think we all owe him a lot for standing up and taking a principled position and a difficult position sometimes in our Party, and also for Jo Ann Emerson for working so hard on many of these issues.

Let me just say I think that people can make the argument effectively and persuasively sometimes on whether travel will or will not help a brutal regime like we see in Cuba. I think there are arguments that can be made on both sides. I happen to believe that the arguments on the side of allowing freedom are far more persuasive to me. But as long as the arguments can be made on either side, then it seems to me to be a terrible thing to tell someone else, somebody who does have family there, that I am going to impose my feelings about whether or not this will produce regime change or how effective the policy could be on you.

Now, somebody may take the position and can take the position always under a free system that if I have triplets living on the island, or if I have family members on the island or anything, I will not visit them until freedom comes to that island. That is a position that anyone, any Cuban-American in Florida or New Jersey or Arizona or anywhere should be able to take. But by the same token I, as a Member of Congress or in an official position, should not be able to tell another Cuban-American family you are going to make that choice. You have to make the choice of whether to visit your mother on her deathbed or whether to go to her funeral because you cannot go to both. That is simply wrong.

And when we talk about as mentions that we have to champion human freedom, how in the world do we champion human freedom when we tell a family I am going to impose my views on you because I think that the regime will change faster if you stay away? You can make that choice yourself, but I am going to impose that choice on you anyway. That just seems to me at the core of this argument.

The default should always be freedom. It should always be freedom unless there is a compelling national security reason otherwise, which is absent in this case, particularly when we have gone on 49 years with this regime with some form of travel restrictions going on, and we still have this regime. It is tough to make a compelling, I would think, national security reason. You can make some other arguments, but like I say as long as there is an argument, as long as it is not clear-cut and settled to tell a family that you cannot visit your family in need, and right now, look at the situation right now. A massive hurricane, devastation on the island, some death, a lot of suffering, and families cannot even go and give aid and comfort. That, to me, is simply, simply wrong.

So I thank the witnesses for all the work over the years that you have done, and I agree with what you have said, and I yield back.

Mr. DELAHUNT. If I can, Congressman Flake, your observations prompts me to read into the record a quote that I think reflects the sentiments that you just expressed. It is from a blog on the Internet. It was brought to my attention yesterday by staff because I am not really conversant with the blogosphere. But the blog is called "Kill Castro." So I guess we can presume that its authors are not fans of Fidel and Raul. But they support ending restrictions on travel and remittances, and here is what they have to say:

"Why do we want to go against the grain of normal human feelings which are, according to our culture, to help people in need? Why do we want people to forget about their families and ignore their pleas? Is it going to destroy the tyranny or is it going to send a message to Cuba that is totally negative? Do we think that the people of Cuba are really going to ignore the fact that some of us are for their punishment? Who gave us the moral authority to tell free people, Cuban exiles, what to do, and who gave us moral authority to impose only one view on them? Our position is that there should be total freedom to do what you want, go to Cuba or not, send money or not, and that is going to be your own personal decision and responsibility. It is not our position to dictate what anybody should do."

You are not part of this blog, I take, it Congressman Flake? Okay. But I think it is important to read that into the record as well, and unless any other member has any questions of our witnesses—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Dana.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I feel like I am a little outnumbered here today, but that is okay. Let me note that the restrictions that were put on travel to Lebanon I understand were put there after American citizens and others who traveled to Lebanon were kidnapped and precipitated a major crisis that led to very—you know, the

death of an American marines, et cetera, as we got involved in Lebanon. But certainly the restrictions that you talked about, Mr. LaHood, were basically put in place specifically to prevent the Americans from being kidnapped over there. Was that not the case?

Mr. LAHOOD. They were put in place because of what people believed were terrorist groups coming in from Syria and also——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Right.

Mr. LAHOOD [continuing]. And people living in the country as members of Hezbollah.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Right.

Mr. LAHOOD. And my point is that the restrictions were lifted notwithstanding the fact that, you know, they never really——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. That is correct. That is correct. We did not do that.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Let the gentleman finish his——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. Go right ahead. Finish your thought.

Mr. LAHOOD. Well, my thought is this. We have had these restrictions in Cuba and they have had no impact on Castro. They have not hurt him one bit. They have had no impact, and that was the point we were making with the restrictions. A number of people traveled to Lebanon and were not injured, were not killed, and ultimately we made that point to the State Department, and they lifted them.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Right. And we at the same time we were realizing that a lot of the problems in Lebanon were created by Syria, we just sort of backed——

Mr. LAHOOD. Syria and Hezbollah which existed in the country.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Right, and we backed down from that and some people believe that perhaps that message was not the right kind of message to send to Syria or to eventually the others in that region like Iran, which was not a good message to send; that we were moving back from those restrictions.

Mr. LAHOOD. Can I ask you a question?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, first of all, I have got limited time here, and let me——

Mr. DELAHUNT. My friend, you can take as much time as you want.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right.

Mr. DELAHUNT. So do not feel that the chair will impose any limitations.

Mr. LAHOOD. When you are finished, I just have one question for you, Dana.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Sure. Go right ahead.

Mr. LAHOOD. No, you go ahead, you finish.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. About the example of China that was used, let me just say that China at a certain point was actually liberalizing dramatically, and it ended up in Tiananmen Square where there was a turning point, a tipping point, and we decided just to do business as usual with the Chinese after the slaughtered the democracy movement, and I believe that China is perhaps one of America's worst adversaries right now and potential enemies that could do great harm in the future.

I think this nonchalant, "Well, we will treat China just like we do everybody else," look how much trade they have while ignoring the thousands of people who are being arrested for their religious convictions, ignoring the Falun Gong being thrown into jail, and their body parts being sold to Westerners who, oh, well, let it is just free enterprise, you know.

I would hope that we would not have the policy with other dictatorships that we have had with China and build up their economy while they have had zero liberalization in terms of setting their people politically free. That will lead to bring problems, and I think that the threat of China is far worse now than what it was even though Mao is gone.

And yes, Mao is gone, but his regime is in place, and it is being empowered by the economic strength that we give them by treating them as if they were no different than a democratic country which goes right back to Cuba. You do not treat a country that is run by a gang of dictators, and that is what they are, Castro's regime is still in place, that has not changed, and we do not treat them as if they are the Government of Brazil or you will expect to have something that will hurt you in the long run.

And one last note that has been made and then any question you have for me will be fine, let us just see what the Cuban people—I mean, we have American congressmen here and we have others here speaking for the outrage among the Cuban community. Let us just note that Cuban-Americans Members of Congress, Democrats and Republicans, do not seem to agree with you. The Cuban-Americans who have been elected to Congress who have to respond directly to Cuban-American voters are on the opposite side of this.

Now, they understand, and you know, they are families, they are separated from their families as well, but they understand, as do the people who vote for them, that, yes, sometimes it is important to sacrifice that moment of love and compassion because in the long run it will bring repression and brutality and misery to large numbers of people. And, yes, you do not always go and hug your children when you have to go off and fight a war sometimes, and in this case we do not have to go off and fight a war but at least we have to have policies that will make sure that in the end Cuba does not have a government that is an expanding power as we see in China, that is hostile to the United States, but simply that we now are billionaires are going to go and make money by doing business in Cuba as if it was not a dictatorship.

One last note. We have, and we talk about humanitarian things, who is causing the problem? I still suggest it is the nature of the Castro regime, the regime that is still in place that is causing these hardships that we are talking about. Let us note the United States has offered \$5 million in relief for hurricane assistance and relief. That has been rejected by the Castro regime, which is typical of what you can expect from that regime.

I do not want to do anything that will give the wrong message to anybody to say that we are pulling back from the tough stand that we have taken on that regime, and siding with the freedom-loving people of Cuba. Thank you very much.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I thank the gentleman and before I recognize Congressman LaHood for his response, let me just note I am some-

what confused about the gentleman's observations about China. Now, if he is suggesting that we should ban family travel for Chinese-Americans back to their homeland, then let him file a bill and we will have a debate on that.

I think what Congressman LaHood and Congresswoman Emerson are talking to is the hypocrisy that exists to just simply target this particular ethnic group in this country, Cuban-Americans. I found it fascinating that there was an allusion to Saddam Hussein who, by the way, we supported in the 1980s, for whom we provided the technologies for the development of weapons of mass destruction, whom the former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld shook hands with and opened up an Embassy in Baghdad in 1986, so talk about hypocrisy. And yet as has been testified to, an Iraqi-American could travel to visit their family even when Saddam Hussein ruled there with an iron fist.

So I guess it is just simply beyond the Cuban-Americans community in terms of a policy, it affects our whole world, our image to the rest of the world. The gentleman is passionate and eloquent in his criticism of China, and yet not only can Chinese-Americans travel and there is a number of Chinese that come here as tourists, and tragically and unfortunately we have managed over the course of the past 8 years, my friend, to borrow \$1 trillion from China, but no, no, no, we cannot let Cuban-Americans, we cannot let a Cuban-American travel to visit a sick mother or father or child, only once for 14 days. How humane. I do not see how we can call that policy anything but immoral and repugnant.

Now let me also note that you spoke about the Cuban-American community. I have over the course of the past 10 years have met and hopefully developed friendships with many in the Cuban-American community, and there is a great diversity of views within that particular community, but let us note for the record, my friend, that in—this is the CRS, this is not a poll taken by a candidate or by a Member of Congress, this is a report by the Congressional Research Service, that a 2007 Florida International University poll examining attitudes of the Cuban-American community in south Florida shows that 64 percent of respondents would like to return to the less restrictive policies on travel and remittances that were in place in 2003.

Moreover, I find this fascinating, 65.2 percent of those that were polled support allowing unrestricted travel overall, not just family travel. So I am glad that you gave me the opportunity to read that into the record.

With that let me recognize the gentleman from Illinois for a response.

Mr. LAHOOD. Well, no, Dana, the only question I have is tell me what value there has been with this policy in terms of the effect that it has had on the Castro regime. I mean, what has it done to them? Zero. Why have a policy like this that has no impact on the regime? What has it done to him?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. This policy, as recognized by the Cuban-American people themselves, that is why when you claim that politics is getting in the way, politics just means the majority of the people will be upset with the position that you are taking and vote in a different way.

So if the only reason this policy is in place is because of politics, it is because a large number of voters, Cuban-Americans, disagree with you on that.

Mr. LAHOOD. What has it done to impact on Castro?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay, I am——

Mr. LAHOOD. That is my question.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I want to get——

Mr. LAHOOD. Yes, go ahead.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And that is, what we have to say is what will the impact be, what will the impact be if we are seen to be weakening our position in terms of what positions we have taken about the Castro regime that looks like we are softening our positions, it will not lead to a better chance for freedom on that island.

Mr. LAHOOD. My answer is correct. It has had zero impact on him——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. No, I would agree—no, I don't think that——

Mr. LAHOOD [continuing]. And his regime.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. No, I do not think we can say what it would have been like otherwise. I do not think you can say changing that factor would have made certain things happen, but what we can say is that in Syria, when we dealt with Syria, we did certain things in Lebanon that looked like it was weakening our position, our demands, and Syria took that as weakness on our part even though, even though those policies in and of themselves looked very rational.

Well, no. If a dictatorship, if a regime, if the gangs down there say, Ah-ha, American is weakening its position, that will embolden them in the same way in Lebanon it emboldened the Syrians.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Congressman Don Payne from New Jersey.

Mr. PAYNE. Well, thank you. I will be brief and other members have to leave. But I would like to also express my appreciation for the work that Congressman LaHood has done during his time in Congress. I have mentioned to him personally and publicly that I think that he has been a true, a good example of what a good congressman ought to be like, and so we are going to miss you a great deal.

Ms. Emerson is sticking around, so I do not have to say anything about her. [Laughter.]

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Yes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Perhaps we can be moving on to a panel so we do have some Cuban-Americans here who will be expressing what their views are.

Mr. PAYNE. I will take my time back. I did not yield to you. I just have a few things that I want to say. As a matter of fact, I will be brief, but I just listened to all the pride you take in those speeches you wrote for President Reagan, and you talk about how bad a regime is and how terrible it is to their people, and people in prison and the gulags and all the rest. When you were writing those papers, I do not know what you were thinking about Jonas Savimbi, and you need a—Savimbi—who in prison people who murdered them stole the money, but was totally supported by you and your colleagues, and when you talk about Mobutu, who used to come to Christmas parties at the White House, and he had ev-

everybody under the sun in prison. I mean, he had villas in France on money that the U.S. Government gave him, and he summarily murdered people and threw them in prison.

So if you are going to be, be an equal opportunity basher. I mean, if Castro is so bad, why were these other people actually entertained in the Reagan White House? Mobutu was. And of course, the worse regime in the world, apartheid where people even if their brothers and sisters, if the brother was lighter-skin than the other black brother or sister, they had to be separated physically from their family and live in the colored section away from his family. They used to have a comb test. They put a comb through your hair and if the comb did not go through equally—these were the policies that were supported proudly by you and your great late President Reagan.

So if we are going to be so harsh, an apartheid that is the worst regime in the world, and what did you say? Oh, we should just have constructive engagement, you know, Charles Crocker and those folks.

So the inconsistency is just unbelievable, and I stand with the gentlemen, Dr. Paul and Congressman Flake and of course our two panelists that are left here, and Mr. Chairman, I wholeheartedly support this legislation.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you, Mr. Payne, and again let me thank our colleagues and we will excuse them, and we will see them on the floor presumably shortly. Thank you.

Now let us have our second panel come forward. I hope staff has indicated who is on the second panel. I am going to introduce them while they are assembling.

Our first witness is Hector Palacios, a leader of the pro-democracy movement in Cuba, and a man whom I have met. I consider him a personal friend, and an individual of great courage. He is the Director of the Center of Social Studies, and Secretary of TODOS UNIDOS.

In the Black Spring of 2003, when 75 democracy activists were arrested, he was sentenced to a 25-year sentence. He was released in December 2006 because of poor health.

Hector was formerly an official in the Cuban Communist Party. He left in 1980 as a response to what he perceived to be the Cuban Government's harsh repression of Cubans wanting to emigrate from the island.

Since 1980, Hector Palacios has advocated for reform in Cuban Government, and has been active in opposition politics. He has also been an active organizer for the Varela Project and is an independent librarian.

Our next witness is Marlene Arzola. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Florida International University. For almost 5 years, she has worked as a therapist for foster children with CHARLEE Homes for Children in Miami. Since 2004, she works as Director of Therapeutic Activities for the Hebrew Home for the Aged in South Beach.

Marlene left Cuba in 1989, leaving behind her 77-year-old father, her 59-year-old mother, two sisters, a nephew, and a very extensive family. She left Cuba seeking freedom and opportunities. As all good sons and daughters, whether they are Cubans, Americans or

any other nationality, they feel compelled out of love and duty to help their parents who are in need. However, Marlene is not allowed to travel freely and help her family due to the existing restrictions on family travel to Cuba. She lives in Miami Beach with her 8-year-old son Liam.

Ms. ARZOLA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am sorry.

Mr. DELAHUNT. One moment. I have got to get organized here. The staff is great but I fumble papers all the time. Who do we have?

Next, we are joined by Blanca González, the mother of Normando Hernández González, a political prisoner suffering the regime of Fidel and Raul Castro. Ms. González was a guest of Mrs. Bush at the 2001 State of the Union Address. In 2002, Ms. González fled Cuba and applied for political asylum in the United States. She now resides in Miami, Florida, with her husband.

While in Cuba, she was a human rights activist, and was harassed by the Cuban Government. Her son, Normando Hernández González, is a writer, an independent journalist, and was arrested on March 18, 2003. He was sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment for reporting on the conditions of state-run services in Cuba, and for criticizing the government's management of issues such as tourism, agriculture, fishing and cultural affairs.

And last but not least, we have Luisa Montero-Diaz who has over 25 years of experience working on a variety of local, national and international programs. She is currently the managing director of the Maryland Multicultural Youth Centers, a division of the Latin American Youth Center, a nonprofit organization serving minority and immigrant youth by providing comprehensive, culturally sensitive programs in education, employment and social services. She oversees three sites in Prince George's and Montgomery counties, which serves over 1,000 young people annually. She is an appointed commissioner on the Governor's Commission on Hispanic Affairs, and the Governor's Workforce Investment Board. She is also affiliated with the Insight Meditation Community of Washington as a teacher, and she began her professional career as a speech therapist for the county public schools. She is a graduate of the University of Maryland, and resides in Takoma Park with her son.

Before we start the testimony from this panel, I have one technical note here. Hector Palacios is currently in Mexico preparing to return to Cuba to continue his efforts there. Since he cannot physically be here, we have recorded a video of his testimony which we will play in a moment. Now, when that is done, we will get him on the phone and go directly into questions and answer with him if members have questions. Then when we are finished with his Q&A, we will hang up and then go to the testimony of the other witnesses.

So let us proceed.

STATEMENT OF MR. HECTOR PALACIOS, CUBAN PRO-DEMOCRACY ACTIVIST AND FORMER POLITICAL PRISONER, VIA VIDEO AND PHONE CONFERENCE

Mr. PALACIOS [through interpreter]. Chairman Delahunt, distinguished members of the committee, I thank you for this oppor-

tunity to come before you today to discuss the current situation in Cuba, and to suggest measures that the United States could take unilaterally to help facilitate the process of change currently underway in Cuba.

Almost 50 years ago the rulers in Havana imposed an ironclad blockade on the people of Cuba, doing away with their economic, civil, and political rights. Later, the Government of the United States decreed an economic embargo against the rulers of Cuba which has been maintained for many years.

In 1999, when the ninth Ibero-American Summit meeting was held in Havana, democratic-minded Cuba, despite intense repression by the state, founded the largest political umbrella of the opposition, bringing together the internal dissidents. It was called "Todos Unidos," "All United." In that document we proclaimed that whoever wishes to act with moral coherence should call for the sanctions imposed by both governments to be struck down.

As the Cuban Government has not answered our request, we cannot ask the United States Government to do so. That would be an undeserving political triumph on the part of the Cuban Government.

Nonetheless, within Cuba, real factors have come about in recent years which could contribute to furthering the changes that are needed in Cuba with a view to bringing about genuine rule of law and a democratic country without political prisoners and with multiparty balance. The factors for change are: First, the gradual disappearance of the founder of that totalitarian state which is significantly weakening the authority of the new government that has been designated. This situation will become even more acute in coming months.

Second, the Cuban population is removing the mask of terror that had been imposed on them and is beginning to assume conscious participation to decide their own future.

Third, democratic-minded Cubans are coming together in four or five political groupings which bring together thousands of activists and which have been increasingly recognized internationally. Moreover, we are seeking total unity with the Cuban diaspora because Cuba belongs to all Cubans.

And fourth, the platform of the authoritarian left in Latin America and the Caribbean is less and less effective, and Cuba is playing an ever less important role in that block. Yet it is still a threat that we should not underestimate.

In the face of these unquestionable realities, it would be prudent for the Government of the United States to adopt measures for the Cuban people to be able to immediately receive the assistance they need, and so that Cubans can be the leading protagonists in their own history. This is the time when change can begin in Cuba.

At this moment it would be beneficial, first of all, to do away with travel restrictions to Cuba for Cubans residing in the United States. They would be the best bearers of hope, moral assistance, and liaison which are essential.

Second, lift current restrictions that limit remittances to Cuba and which criminalist assistance to family members.

And third, it should be allowed for those Cubans who wish to cooperate economically with the internal dissidents to do so without

that being a criminal offense. Such resources are essential for the work of democratic-minded Cubans in Cuba.

Eliminating the restrictive measures as we have just laid out will not resolve the economic situation of the regime; nonetheless it would immediately facilitate contacts and resources for carrying out our patriotic work.

The rulers of Cuba are not interested at all in economic advantages, but just in political advantages, and such action would consolidate Cuban society and weaken its rulers.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Palacios follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MR. HECTOR PALACIOS, CUBAN PRO-DEMOCRACY ACTIVIST
AND FORMER POLITICAL PRISONER

Chairman Delahunt and distinguished members of the Committee, I welcome the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the current reality in Cuba and to suggest measures the United States could take unilaterally to help facilitate processes of change already underway on the island.

CURRENT REALITY IN CUBA

Almost 50 years ago the Cuban government imposed an unfair blockade on the people of Cuba denying them the exercise of their economic, civil and political rights. Later, the United States government imposed an economic embargo against the Cuban regime that has remained in effect for many years.

In 1999 during the Ibero-American Summit in Havana Cuban democrats, in spite of the intense repression from the government, created the largest internal opposition umbrella under the name, "TODOS UNIDOS" ("ALL UNITED"). In the document we stated our belief that whoever wants to act with moral coherency, must demand the elimination of the sanctions imposed by both governments.

Since we have not received an answer from the Cuban government to our request, we cannot ask the US government to do the same. It would be an undeserved political success for the Cuban government.

However, over the past two years, important factors have appeared inside Cuba that could hasten the necessary changes in the island leading toward the rule of law and a democratic system, without political prisoners and with multi-party balance.

Current factors for change:

- The slow disappearance of the founder of this totalitarian state, which has led to the rapid weakening of the authority of the new government. This situation will worsen in the next few months.
- The Cuban people have been removing the mask of terror imposed on them and are beginning to take active and thoughtful participation in determining their own future.
- Cuban democrats are concentrating in four or five political blocks that congregate thousands of activists, recognized more every day in the international arena. We also seek total unity with the exiled community because Cuba belongs to all Cubans.
- The authoritarian leftist platform in Latin America and in the Caribbean is becoming less effective every day, and Cuba relevance in this block is decreasing every day, but it is still threatening and we should never underestimate it.

U.S. MEASURES TO FACILITATE CHANGE

Faced with these irrefutable realities, it would be prudent for the United States Government to take steps to ensure that the Cuban people receive, without delay, the help they so urgently need. In addition, Cubans must be the protagonists of their own future. This is the time when changes could begin in Cuba.

At this time it would be helpful to:

- 1 Eliminate all travel restrictions to Cuba for Cubans residing in the United States. They can be the best messengers of hope, moral support and relationships that are so needed.
- 2 Lift current restrictions that limit remittances to the island and which criminalize assistance to family members.

- 3 Allow Cubans wishing to cooperate financially with the internal dissident movement to do so without penalties. Those resources are necessary for the work of the dissidents in Cuba.

CONCLUSION

The elimination of restrictions that we have described would not solve the financial situation of the regime, but rather would immediately provide dissidents with the needed support, contacts and resources to carry out our patriotic activities. Cuban government officials are not interested in economic advantages, but political ones and such actions would consolidate society and weaken the political elite.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I believe we have Hector on the phone. Hector? We are making the call now. This is a high-tech operation up here in the U.S. Government.

Mr. PALACIOS [through Interpreter Jill Clark]. It is connected.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Hector, can you hear me?

You can hear me well, I understand? I hope that you are well, and I convey to you my warmest personal regards and please also convey those same good wishes to Gisela.

It was good meeting with you recently here in Washington, DC. I want you to know that we have just watched and heard your testimony on a video, and we appreciate your words. I have no questions because you and I have communicated frequently on this very issue.

Why don't we have the interpreter interpret.

[Interpreter complied.]

Mr. DELAHUNT. Hector, I am going to now recognize another friend of yours, the Member of Congress from Arizona, Congressman Jeff Flake, for any questions that he might have for you.

Mr. FLAKE. Hector, I appreciate your testimony. It is said by some here that lifting the restrictions on family travel will somehow rescue the regime or aid the regime. You had mentioned in your testimony that you do not believe that is the case. Do you want to elaborate on that?

Mr. PALACIOS [through interpreter]. I can barely hear you. I did not understand the question.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Jeff, if you can make another effort.

Mr. FLAKE. The question, there are some here who believe that lifting the restrictions on family travel will aid the Cuban regime, will aid Raul Castro. How do you feel about that?

Mr. PALACIOS. [Words spoken in Spanish.]

Mr. DELAHUNT. Hector, we need an opportunity—

Mr. PALACIOS [through interpreter]. I wanted to tell you that we believe that not all restrictions are good. It is very interesting what is going on in Cuba today, and for the Cuban-Americans to come and see their relatives would be a source of great inspiration, and the economic situation is quite alarming.

Interpreter CLARK. I am sorry, Mr. Chairman, but there is so much distortion it is very hard to make out the words. If they could adjust the microphone on that end.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I do not know if we can. I am going to request that when you are having difficulty and you are unable to understand what he is saying on your own just simply ask him to repeat what he said, and to speak more quietly.

Interpreter CLARK. He is saying that he also has great difficulty in hearing me. I sound very, very far away

Mr. PALACIOS [through interpreter]. Cubans have a responsibility to help Cubans. And if we keep Cubans from helping their fellow Cubans, we are giving the Cuban Government a reason to accuse the American people of being subversive.

In addition, the Cuban Government is not so much interested in economic problems as in political problems, and we should not give them an opportunity to turn this into a political advantage. The policy of restrictions favors the government in Havana. The biggest embargo has been of the Cuban Government on the Cuban people, and that does have to be lifted, and then we will discuss with the Government of the United States a possible change in its policy.

When we talk about change, we need to talk about some measures that can help the Cuban people.

Mr. DELAHUNT. You know, I just inquired of my friend the ranking member, Mr. Rohrabacher. He has no questions, and I know that neither Mr. Meeks—welcome, Mr. Meeks to this hearing—the gentleman from New York, nor Mr. Carnahan have any questions, and I presume, Mr. Flake, that you are finished.

So let me thank Hector Palacios for his testimony, and warm regards, my friend

Mr. PALACIOS [through interpreter]. I thank the United States Congress for listening to me on behalf of the Cuban people.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you, and we will now terminate the telephone call and proceed to the testimony of this panel. Why do we not begin with Ms. Arzola, and then Ms. González and we will conclude with Ms. Montero-Díaz.

I should also inform the panel that votes are expected and anticipated in 10–15 minutes. I understand that you have all submitted written statements that obviously the committee will review and make part of the record of this committee. So if you could keep your remarks somewhat limited, we could excuse you, or if we cannot, we would hope that you could stay during votes and we will return.

Ms. Arzola.

**STATEMENT OF MS. MARLENE ARZOLA, CUBAN-AMERICAN
WITH FAMILY IN CUBA**

Ms. ARZOLA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, all of you for the invitation for me to come here in the name of my son, Liam. I am a single mother and I left Cuba in 1989. I came to the U.S. seeking freedom and opportunities.

My son Liam was born here in the United States. A few months after I left Cuba, my middle sister, Zoila, died in a car accident. At that time, her son Leonardo, my nephew, was 2 years old. My mother is now 78 years old and in bad health. If she dies, I will no longer be able to visit Leonardo. Why? Because the 2004 United States travel policy toward Cuba says that you can visit your family in Cuba only every 3 years. Moreover, the travel policy defines who your family is and who is not. So, according to this policy, my nephew is not considered part of my family, and I could no longer visit him.

In 2004, Liam, my son and I went to Cuba to bury my father. He was suffering from Alzheimer's. Since the travel restriction had just come into effect in 2004, we had to wait until 2007 to go again.

For 3 years, my sick mom had to take care of my disabled sister, my older sister, without my support or without the joy that my visit could have brought to her. For 3 years, my mother and my son were not allowed the pleasure of being with each other, to play, to cuddle, or to hear family stories, to share home-made desserts, or to enjoy that very special relationship between children and their grandparents.

My son Liam was born here, as I said before, and he is not allowed to visit his grandmother, his only grandparent, once every 3 years. For Cubans as well as for Americans or any other culture, maintaining family ties is very important.

In 2007, after 3 years of separation from his grandmother—we are talking about a child—the bond that he has with the grandmother was almost gone. When we arrived in Cuba, it was as he was encountering a stranger. Liam has to wait now for another 3 years until August 2010 to see his grandmother. By then she will be 80 years of age, and he will be 10 years old. His childhood will be almost over, and the memories that he should have of his grandmother will be missing. There will be a gap in his identity. It is like *déjà vu*, like a Peter Pan in reverse.

And I put emphasis on the damaging effects of separation between Liam and his grandmother because Liam is a child. As his mother, I have the duty to voice his rights. Let me please quote from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16.3:

“The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.”

Thus, the United States Government is violating the fundamental rights of its citizens by failing to protect the family structure. This is why I am here today, in the name of the many Liams, Leonardos, Marias, Thomases, and all the Cuban children who are caught in the middle of politics that override their interests. I am raising my voice in the name of their lost memories.

If my mother, who is 78 years old, could get worse and end up in the hospital, I am not allowed to travel to Cuba to be by her side due to these travel restrictions, and it breaks my heart. Does it make sense that I cannot see my mother if, God forbid, and she ends up in the hospital just because of these travel restrictions?

The children who are caught in the middle of these restrictions and who have parents in Cuba, or who have grandmothers or aunts or nieces, they are not thinking they are not going to be allowed to see their loved ones in Cuba except every 3 years, and they do not know that they are not able to go back if the only family left consist of nieces, nephews, aunts, and uncles or cousins. Not in this country. It is unbelievable that this is happening in this compassionate country, the United States of America.

This issue is not about being a Democrat or being a Republican, or being in favor of or against the Cuban Government. This issue is about protecting the family structure, and especially our children.

Hurricane Ike caused significant devastation throughout Cuba. When I spoke to my mother on the phone after the hurricane, she was in despair. It was still raining heavily and the roof of her house was leaking in many places. Haitians in the United States

can travel freely to Haiti to help their family and friends. Americans who have family in Galveston can offer them support. Cubans in the United States want to enjoy the same rights. If I could, I could be in Guantanamo helping my 78-year-old mother fix her roof. What in the world is wrong with that?

Cubans in the United States are not the only ones who have suffered in exile. Those in Cuba have suffered family separation, dictatorship, poverty, and lack of human rights. It is time to wake up to the cry of our immediate neighbors, to the pain and suffering of the Cuban people. It is time to put aside politics by lifting all travel restrictions to Cuba and let the Cuban family from both sides of the Straits come together as one.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Arzola follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MS. MARLENE ARZOLA, CUBAN-AMERICAN WITH FAMILY IN CUBA

I left Cuba in 1989 and came to the USA seeking freedom and opportunities. I left behind my parents, two sisters, a nephew, cousins, aunts, uncles, neighbors and friends. Currently, I live in Miami Beach with my 8-year-old son, Liam, and I work as the Director of Therapeutic Activities for the Hebrew Home for the Aged in South Beach. I am a single mother.

A few months after I left Cuba, my middle sister, Zoila, died as the result of a car accident. At that time, her son Leonardo was two years old. My mother is now 78 years old and in bad health. If she dies, I will no longer be able to visit Leonardo. Why? Because the 2004 U.S. Travel Policy towards Cuba says that you can only visit your family in Cuba every three years. Further, the travel policy defines who can and cannot be a member of your immediate family. And, because nephews are not considered part of your immediate family, I could no longer visit Leonardo—my only nephew.

In 2004, Liam and I went to Cuba to bury my father who suffered from Alzheimer's. Since the travel restrictions had just come into effect in 2004, we had to wait until 2007 to go again. For three years, my elderly and sick Mom had to care for my disabled older sister without my support, or without the joy that my visit could have brought. For three years, my Mother and my son were not allowed the pleasure of being with each other, to play, to cuddle, to hear family stories, to share home-made desserts, or to enjoy that very special relationship between children and their grandparents.

My son Liam was born in the U.S. Liam is allowed to visit his Grandmother—his only grandparent—once every three years. While 3 years at our age seem to disappear before we know it, for children it is a lifetime. It is unimaginable. For Cubans, as well as for Americans or any other culture, maintaining family ties is very important. In 2007, after 3 years of separation from his Grandmother, the bond that Liam and my mother had in the earlier years was gone. When we arrived in Cuba, he did not know how to behave around her. She was a stranger. And now, although I maintain regular telephone contact with my Mom, Liam is reluctant to talk on the phone with her.

Liam has to wait for another three years, until August 2010, to see his grandmother. By then she will be 80 years of age and he will be 10 years old. His childhood will be almost over, and the memories that he should have of his grandmother will be missing. There will be a gap in his identity. It is like déjà vu, like Peter Pan in reverse.

I put emphasis on the damaging effects of separation between Liam and his grandmother because Liam is a child. As his mother, it is my duty to voice his rights. Let me quote from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16 (3) "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State". Thus, the United States government is violating the fundamental rights of its citizens by failing to protect the family structure. This is why I'm here today, in the name of the many Liams, Thomases, Marias, Leonardos and all the Cuban children who are caught in the middle of politics that override their interests. I'm raising my voice in the name of their lost memories.

When my son asks me why he cannot see his grandmother, there is no logical explanation that satisfies him. When I think that my mother's health could get worse and she would end up in the hospital, and I'm not allowed to travel to Cuba to be

by her side due to the U.S. travel restrictions, it breaks my heart. Does it make sense that I cannot see my mother, if God forbid, her health worsens because of this policy? When families separate to come looking for a better future in this country, and to pave the road for others, they don't envision a three-year wait imposed by—what we think—is the most compassionate government of all—the United States of America. Indeed, the children who are caught in the middle are not thinking they are not going to be allowed to see their loved ones in Cuba, their mother, father, or grandmother, but every three years. And they don't know that they will not be able to go back if the only family left consists of nieces, nephews, aunts and uncles, or cousins. It is unbelievable that this would happen in America.

This issue is not about being a Democrat or Republican, or being in favor of or against the Cuban government. This issue is about protecting the family structure, and especially our children.

Hurricane Ike caused significant devastation throughout Cuba. When I spoke to my mother on the phone after the Hurricane, she was in despair. It was still raining heavily and the roof of her house was leaking in many places. Haitians in the United States can travel freely to Haiti to help their family and friends. Americans who have family in Galveston can offer them housing, money, clothes, supplies and emotional support. Cubans in the United States want to enjoy the same rights. If I could, I would be in Guantanamo helping my 78-year-old mother fix her roof. What in the world is wrong with that?

Cubans in the United States are not the only ones who have suffered in exile. Those in Cuba have suffered family separation, a dictatorship, poverty, near-famine and lack of human rights. It is time to wake up to the cry of our immediate neighbors, to the pain and suffering of the Cuban people. It's time to let love spread its wings and assist the ones in need. It's time to put aside politics by lifting all travel restrictions to Cuba and let the Cuban family from both sides of the Straits come together as one.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you, Ms. Arzola, and we have been called to vote. It is a 15-minute vote. So hopefully we will be able to at least hear the testimony of Ms. González and then we will take a recess for approximately 30 minutes, and we will ask you, Ms. Montero-Diaz, if you will indulge us and wait, and then we can come back and have a conversation.

But would you please proceed, Ms. González, and I noted that Ms. Arzola, you went 1 minute over the 5-minute rule, so we are going to make sure that Ms. González gets at least 6 months.

Ms. ARZOLA. I apologize.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Please, Ms. González.

Ms. González, I apologize, I do not mean to interrupt but what would your preference be; that you read your statement in Spanish and we could have it interpreted later, or would you prefer to have the interpreter as you pause testify in English?

Interpreter EDWARDS. She prefers for me to read the first paragraphs that she has read already.

STATEMENT OF MS. BLANCA GONZÁLEZ, MOTHER OF POLITICAL PRISONER, CUBAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST

Ms. GONZÁLEZ [through Interpreter Martha Edwards]. Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the subcommittee, it is an honor for me to be able to address you.

My name is Blanca González and I am the mother of prisoner of conscious, Normando Hernández. My son was arrested in March 2003 in what is know as the Black Spring, that led to 75 men and women being imprisoned because of their peaceful opposition in Cuba.

My son, Normando Hernández, was condemned to 25 years of prison simply for exercising his profession of independent journalist. His trial came from out of the Stalinist era and there was

no chance for him to defend himself because even before the trial began he and the rest had already been condemned.

My son is in the prison at Kilo 7 in Camaguey in subhuman conditions. His many ailments have not been attended to. He suffers from high blood pressure and gastrointestinal problems that are getting ever worse because of the lack of medical attention.

Interpreter EDWARDS. In order to be briefer, I am just going to read in English.

Ms. GONZÁLEZ [through Interpreter Edwards]. During the 5 years that he has been in prison his cells have been limited to very small spaces where he has had very little ventilation and where humidity has gone into his bones and rodents remind us of the inhumanity of the system that keeps him in prison.

His wife, Yarai, and his daughter, Daniela who is 6 years old, are only allowed to visit him every 45 days for 2 hours at a time. On their last visit, they found him in a precarious state of health because of the rigorous conditions of the jail that he is in with the aggravating factor of having lost a great deal of weight.

I wanted to come here today because, while you are debating whether or not restrictions should be lifted that have been imposed as a form of sanction to the regime in Havana, because of the arbitrary imprisonment of peaceful opposition, the Cuban people is a victim of—has since then become a victim of the horrible plague of the Hurricanes Ike and Gustav.

How can anyone believe that faced with the magnitude of the tragedy that is faced by 11 million Cubans, how can anybody believe that the visit of a view Cubans to the islands will solve any problems?

Mr. Chairman, the high cost of air fare to Cuba is around \$800, and if you add to that the cost of a passport is 400 additional dollars. Then you have to add to that the 44 pounds allowed for each traveler, which costs another \$10. How can this be a solution to take such a reduced amount of aid to families in Cuba? There are many families that have recently arrived in this country from Cuba whose economic situation would not even allow this kind of option.

Why are voices raised here today and why are not these voices raised in the international community, and why does not that community then demand that Fidel Castro's regime should accept the massive humanitarian aid that has been offered by the United States?

Many people here today forget that the sanctions that were debated here were imposed because of the arrests that took place during the Black Spring of 2003. I remind you that out of the 75 people taken prisoner, 59 are still in jail, in Castro's jail, and they are victims of ill-treatment and repression. What has changed?

What would justify that we lift sanctions against a despotic regime which has total disregard for justice and which absolutely refuses to give a single sign of a willingness to change?

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Congress of the United States, we Cubans have always looked to this country as a forum for freedom and democracy, and we do not want you to be the first to turn your backs on a people who have been victims of one of the longest dictatorships in the world, nor to prize somebody who continues to enslave our people.

As the mother of a Cuban political prisoner who has family in Cuba, I respectfully ask that you do not contribute to lift even one sanction against Cuba.

Thank you very much.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you, Ms. González, and we are going to make an effort to go, and we have only got a little under 7 minutes. So if you can restrict your comments to 5 minutes, Ms. Montero-Diaz, it might allow us to excuse you or if you so wish to stay and respond to questions. But please proceed.

**STATEMENT OF MS. LUISA MONTERO-DIAZ, CUBAN-AMERICAN
WITH FAMILY IN CUBA**

Ms. MONTERO-DIAZ. Thank you.

Good morning, Chairman Delahunt, and other members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. My name is Luisa Montero-Diaz. I was born in Cuba in 1955, and left the island with my immediate family on December 8, 1961. I grew up in a small town in North Carolina, went to college there, and moved to the DC area to attend graduate school. I currently live in Maryland with my family.

My family was the first on both my father's and my mother's side of the family to leave Cuba and come to the United States. Through the years, many family members followed us. Many did not. Despite never knowing my maternal grandmother, she died before I was born, I have this sense that my life has been much influenced by her. This influence has come to me through my mother and her two sisters. The connection with my two aunts, just as with my grandmother, has not been a physical one. Both my aunts remained in Cuba.

Since leaving Cuba when I was 6 years old, I can count on two hands the number of days I have been physically present with my aunts. Two visits to Cuba, one in the early eighties and the second in the mid-nineties, allowed me, in essence, to meet my aunts as an adult. These trips were exciting, sad, too short, and far between, and life-altering for me.

Even though there has been a geographical divide between our families, through my mother I grew up feeling an amazingly strong bond with these aunts, a bond that my mother passed down to me, my sister and my brother, a bond so strong that I consider these three women, my mother and her two sisters, the most important influences in my life, the way I live it, my values, and the choices I have made.

My mother is now 88 years old. Her older sister passed away in Cuba 4 years ago. The younger sister, Yara, died less than 2 years ago. The year leading up to my Aunt Yara's death was a rough one on my family. Two nephews living in Cuba died within 2 months of each other. They were the ones who had looked after and cared for my aunt as she did not have children. With these nephews gone, during her last months while ailing and physically fragile but mentally alert, my Aunt Yara was taken care of by in-laws and a great niece.

My mother longed to see her sister to check on her to see for herself that she was being taken care of, her needs being met, to touch her once more. Certainly my aunt in her condition could not travel, but neither was my mother able to travel. As a daughter and as

a niece, my desire was to be able to make that trip for them, to go there as my mother would if she could, taking messages of support and love and concern, and yet this option was and still is not available to me or other members of my family.

My mother is old enough and wise enough to bring some resolution to this situation through prayer and her faith that my aunt was well taken care of. This faith is what she has relied on through all of life's difficulties. Up until Yara's death, she continued, as she had for 45 years without missing a week, to write my aunt a weekly letter. Yet, I know that there were many nights of lost sleep; there were nights when my mother wondered: Did Yara have dinner tonight? What did she eat? Is she sleeping well? Did they give her the medicine? Is she cold?

One trip would not have answered all these questions nor made the loss any less difficult, nor would it have alleviated the pain of years of separation. But one trip would have given consolation. It would have allowed my mother to know the true reality rather than living with the imagined one. And most of all, through me, it would have reinforced familial relationships and obligations—those bonds and influences that are passed on and become a part of what forms us from generation to generation.

The current travel restrictions are unfair and inhumane. They fly in the face of family, of love, bonds and family obligations. The sanctions have not even served their original intention. This is not only a failed policy; it is a counterproductive, harmful, and cruel one.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Montero-Diaz follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MS. LUISA MONTERO-DIAZ, CUBAN-AMERICAN WITH FAMILY
IN CUBA

My name is Luisa Montero-Diaz. I was born in Cuba in 1955 and left the island with my immediate family on December 18, 1961. I grew up in a small town in North Carolina, went to college there and moved to the DC area to attend graduate school at the University of Maryland. I currently live in Takoma Park, Maryland with my family. I am a director of a nonprofit organization working with at-risk, marginalized young people (the Latin American Youth Center/ Maryland Division).

My family was the first on both my father's and mother's side of the family to leave Cuba. Through the years, many family members followed us; many did not. Despite never knowing my maternal grandmother (she died before I was born), I have this sense that my life has been much influenced by her. This influence has come to me through my mother and her two sisters. The connection with my two aunts, just as with my grandmother, has not been a physical one. Both my aunts remained in Cuba. Since leaving Cuba when I was six years old, I can count on two hands the number of days I have been physically present with my aunts. Two visits to Cuba, one in the early 80's and the second in the mid-90's allowed me, in essence, to "meet" my aunts as an adult. These trips were exciting, sad, too short and far between, AND life altering.

Even though there has been a geographical divide between our families—through my mother, I grew up feeling an amazingly strong bond with these aunts—a bond that my mother passed down to me and my sister and brother. A bond so strong that I consider these three women—my mother and her two sisters—the most important influences in my life, the way I live it, my values, and the choices I have made.

My mother is now 88 years old. Her older sister passed away in Cuba four years ago; the younger sister, Yara, died less than 2 years ago. The year leading up to my Aunt Yara's death was a rough one on my family. Two nephews living in Cuba died within two months of each other. They were the ones who looked after and cared for my aunt since she did not have children. During her last months, while

ailing, physically fragile, but mentally alert, Yara was taken care of by in-laws and a great niece.

My mother longed to see her sister, to check on her, to see for herself that she was being taken care of—her needs being met, to touch her once more. However, she was unable physically to make a trip to Cuba to see her sister. Certainly my aunt, in her condition, could not travel either. As a daughter and as a niece, my desire was to be able to make that trip for them; to go there as my mother would if she could, taking messages of support and love and concern. And yet this option was and still is not available to me or any other members of my family. We had no choice as extended family.

My mother is old enough and wise enough to bring some resolution to this situation through prayer and her faith that my aunt was well taken care of. This faith is what she has relied on through all of life's difficulties. Up until Yara's death, she continued, as she had for 45 years without missing a week, to write my aunt a weekly letter. Yet, I know there were many nights of lost sleep; there were nights when my mother wondered: Did Yara have dinner tonight? What did she eat? Is she sleeping well? Did they give her the medication? Is she cold?

One trip would not have answered all these questions nor made the loss any less difficult, nor would it have alleviated the pain of years of separation. But one trip would have given consolation. It would have allowed my mother to know the true reality rather than living with the imagined one. And most of all, it would have reinforced familial relationships and obligations—those bonds and influences that are passed on and become part of what forms us from generation to generation.

The current travel restrictions are unfair and inhumane. They fly in the face of family love and bonds and family obligations. The sanctions have not even served their original intention. This is not only a failed policy, it is a counterproductive, harmful one.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you very much, and let me express my gratitude to the three witnesses. Your stories are very poignant, and they are very powerful, and I know in the course of our deliberations we will review your testimony and express to you our support for all of you in your families in Cuba.

With that, with the concurrence of the ranking member, we will excuse you from further testimony, and when we return we will ask our final panel to convene. Thank you.

We are in recess.

[Recess.]

Mr. DELAHUNT. We will come to order once more for our final panel. Welcome to everyone. I also want to submit various documents for the record, and then I will go to introduce you and hopefully my ranking member, Mr. Rohrabacher, will be joining us.

First, I would like to put into the record a letter from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to President Bush, asking him to suspend even temporarily restrictions on travel and remittances. I would note that the Catholic Church is the only independent institution in Cuba, so presumably the American church is communicating with the Cuban church and is reflective of their views.

[The information referred to follows:]



Office of the President

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3100 • FAX 202-541-3166

Cardinal Francis George, OMI
Archbishop of Chicago

September 11, 2008

The Honorable George W. Bush
President
The White House
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

In light of the devastation and humanitarian disaster caused by recent hurricanes in Cuba and the efforts of extended families, friends and organizations to reach those in need, I urge you to suspend – even temporarily – Treasury and Commerce Department restrictions and licensing requirements for humanitarian travel and remittances by American citizens and assistance by not-for-profit organizations.

At times of crisis, there are simple and basic acts of charity on which people rely. Churches, as well as governments, urge people to reach out and respond with generosity to those in desperate need. The United States has a tradition of such assistance for which it can be rightly proud. At this time, all should be done to facilitate humanitarian assistance, be it through institutions like Catholic Relief Services, or through the generosity of individuals moved by the misfortune of their brothers and sisters. Removing restrictions on remittances and travel to Cuba are a necessary step which I urge you to take without delay.

In prayerful support for your efforts to assist all those affected by these ongoing weather emergencies, I remain

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Francis Cardinal George".

Francis Cardinal George, OMI
Archbishop of Chicago
President

Mr. DELAHUNT. The second letter is from two of Cuba's high-profile opponents to the Cuban Government, Martha Beatriz Roque and Vladimiro Roca. Both have fought for liberty for Cuba for years, and both have been incarcerated in Cuban jails for their efforts. They wrote to President Bush asking him to lift the restrictions on family travel, remittances, and gift packages, just as the legislation I am filing today would accomplish. They are on the island. They know what they need, and we should listen to them.

So without objection both of those letters will be submitted for the record.

[The information referred to follows:]

Open Letter to President George W. Bush
City of Havana
3 September 2008

His Excellency George W. Bush
President of the United States of America
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

On August 30th, the western part of Cuba suffered the onslaught of Hurricane Gustav, which has caused considerable and lamentable damages in the province of Pinar del Rio, west Havana, and the Isle of Pines. Although there are no official figures, preliminary estimates show that more than 100,000 homes have been affected; as well as the social infrastructure, agriculture, and other damages, which have not yet been calculated.

Knowing the intransigence of the Cuban government to accept help from your country, we are reaching out to the highest level in the United States to ask that you permit American non-governmental organizations to assist this region, so as to alleviate the suffering of its inhabitants.

We ask that, for at least two months, you lift the restrictions of the embargo that concern relations between Cuban exiles and those of us living on the island—specifically, remittances, gift parcels, and travel. Your Excellency, please understand that any relative on the outside wants to be able to have contact with those that are experiencing this difficult situation.

Mr. President, please consider that our fundamental objective is to provide a small breath of air to those who suffer without a solution to their problems.

We thank you in advance for your particular attention, and we respectfully wish you well on behalf of the non-governmental organization, Agenda for the Transition, the members of the Secretariat Pro Tempore,

Vladimiro Roca Antúnez

Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello

Mr. DELAHUNT. Now let me introduce our third panel. I will go first from my left to right. If I can find Mr. Sosa's—I cannot find it but I know that you are from Boston, that you are a member of Red Sox Nation, and that is a very strong bond between you and myself, although I think it is clear we disagree on many issues. But welcome. I know that you are a board member of the group that is called the Cuba Study Group.

Next let me go to—if we did not have staff here, we could not turn the lights on. Sylvia, you are going to have to help me with the pronunciation.

Ms. IRIONDO. Iriondo.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Iriondo. I have noted your white hair, and so we have something in common. She was born in Havana on January 26. Her family, along with thousands of Cubans, fled their homeland seeking freedom in south Florida, and was admitted as a political refugee in 1960. She has worked as a real estate agent and also at a number of community services, including the International Rescue Committee, the State Department of Welfare,

Cuban Refugee Emergency Center, the United Way, and Little Havana Activities and Nutrition Centers.

In 1994, together with a group of Cuban-American women, she founded M.A.R. POR CUBA, Mothers and Women Against Repression, a nonprofit dedicated to the advocacy of human rights, to the promotion of the democratic values, and its mission to help restore fundamental liberties and rights of the Cuban people. Welcome.

And next——

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. You could just say I am the one you disagree with.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Yes, I could say that. Ms. Ninoska Pérez Castellón is a journalist and host of a top-rated south Florida radio talk show, *Ninoska en Mambi*. She is also the host of a prime-time political debate show called *Ultima Palabra* at GenTV. She is also a columnist for *Diario Las Americas*. Her articles have appeared in Latin America and Spain and other prestigious publications in the United States. She is a frequent guest on national and international television, having appeared on such shows as the O'Reilly Factor and Hannity and Colmes. She is frequently quoted and interviewed by the national and international media on Cuba-related issues. She has lectured extensively in colleges and universities, participated in nationally-televised debates, and has testified before the United States Congress on several occasions on Cuba issues. Welcome.

And next is Dr. Francisco Hernández who is the President of the Cuba-American National Foundation. He was born and raised in Cuba. He studied engineering at the University of Havana until 1960, when he went into political exile, joining the Brigade 2506 and participated in the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961. As a result, he served 2 years as a political prisoner until 1963, when he was freed and returned to exile in the United States as part of an agreement between the United States and Cuba. That year he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps and later served in the Marines, active reserve, until 1972, when he retired with a rank of captain.

He has been active in the cause of freedom and democracy for over 40 years, and is a founding member of the board of directors of the Cuban-Americans National Foundation.

Last but not least, Philip Peters is the Vice President of the Lexington Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization based in Arlington, Virginia. He has been conducting research in Cuba and in publishing studies on Cuba's economy since 1996, covering small enterprise, agriculture, information technology, tourism, historic preservation, and other topics. He is also an advisor on United States policy toward Cuba, to the Cuba Working Group of the House of Representatives. He covers Cuba issues in his blog, *The Cuban Triangle*, and has testified before congressional committees and the U.S. International Trade Commission. He also writes on trade and immigration policy.

Prior to joining Lexington, Phil Peters served as a State Department appointee of Presidents Reagan and Bush, and as a senior aid in the House of Representatives in the Office of Representative Jim Courter and the House Armed Services Committee. He holds de-

grees from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and its graduate school.

Welcome all, and let us proceed with Mr. Sosa.

**STATEMENT OF MR. IGNACIO SOSA, EXECUTIVE BOARD
MEMBER, CUBA STUDY GROUP**

Mr. SOSA. Thank you very much. Chairman Delahunt and distinguished members of the committee, I am very grateful to have this opportunity to discuss U.S. restrictions on Cuban-Americans travel.

I am an American who is grateful for the many opportunities this country has provided since I arrived on its shores 48 years ago on a lonely flight from Havana. I am also the son, brother, nephew, and cousin of men who spent years in Fidel Castro's prisons. I admire President George W. Bush's principal advocacy for freedom in every corner of the world. I am also a life-long Republican and an admirer of both Presidents Bush.

As a Republican, I am deeply concerned that my Party's positions on Cuba will lead it to lose the votes of the only reliably Republican Hispanic group in the country, Cuban-Americans.

Mr. DELAHUNT. If I can interrupt you just for 1 minute. I want to reiterate what I had said earlier because all of our—the panel, the first panel, all were Republican, you are a Republican. I know that Phil Peters worked in the Reagan and Bush administrations. And I am pointing this out, I will not ask anyone else unless they want to volunteer, that this is—

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. I am a Republican.

Mr. DELAHUNT. You are a Republican.

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. I am also a Republican.

Mr. DELAHUNT. And you too are a Republican. Are you listening to this, Mr. Meeks? And you are also a Republican, and a Republican.

Ms. IRIONDO. I am too a Republican.

Mr. DELAHUNT. This is a partisan undertaking and I just wanted to note that. But in any event, please proceed.

Mr. SOSA. Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, maintaining restrictions on Cuban-Americans travel and family remittances risks more than just the Republicans losing the key electoral state of Florida. We, as Americans, are in danger of losing the moral high ground in our relations with Cuba. Increasing numbers of Cuban-Americans are calling for an end to restrictions on travel and family remittances to Cuba. Indeed, the data from the 2007 FIU poll that Chairman Delahunt mentioned showed that in excess of 60 percent of Cuban-Americans in south Florida support returning to the pre-2004 rules governing Cuban-American travel and remittances.

Even more importantly, almost all leading dissidents in Cuba, and I stress this, almost all leading dissidents in Cuba, even those who have been the most supportive of United States policy in the past, have asked the U.S. Government to lift travel and remittance restrictions applied to Cuban-Americans. The most recent was Martha Beatriz Roque in a conference call to President Bush on May 5 of this year. The U.S. Government does not restrict travel to any other country in the world, even those on the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism. Only in the case of Cuba does

the U.S. Government regulate the rights of persons to visit their families. This makes no sense.

I am one of those Cuban-Americans who believe we should end of American restrictions on travel and remittances to Cuba by Cuban-Americans. Such limits are counterproductive because they increase the Cuban peoples' dependency on the Cuban Government as the only source of employment and information. Limits on family travel and remittances work to destroy family values and represent the opposite of all that is great about the United States.

I have traveled to Cuba several times on humanitarian missions. I have met with Cubans throughout the island, students, pensioners, clergymen, factory workers, farmers, engineers, the homeless, and several very brave dissidents. I was greeted always with warmth and generosity as well as a barrage of questions on how the world works outside of Cuba. I did my best to extol the virtue of a free society where the rule of law underpins the ability of each citizen to choose the life they want to lead. I never met one Cuban who was in favor of restrictions on Cuban-American travel and remittances—not a single one.

Cuban-Americans traveling to Cuba are especially powerful agents for change. Their success in the United States serves as a compelling advertisement for what Cubans can do if they are free to pursue their dreams and ambitions.

There are those who say that unfettered travel to Cuba by Europeans and Canadians has done little to advance change. I think that is disingenuous. Cuban-Americans traveling to Cuba have a much deeper and more important impact than a German, for example, on vacation in Varadero.

I also argue, as a small government Republican, that it should not be up to bureaucrats in Washington to determine what kind of travel by Cuban-Americans is acceptable. Cuban-Americans are citizens of a free country and they should decide for themselves where they wish to travel.

The damage brought on Cuba by Hurricanes Ike and Gustav have brought to the forefront the damage caused by American restrictions on travel and family remittances. Cuban-Americans are angry that those who espouse family values wish to prevent families in the United States from helping relatives in Cuba. I know from personal experience how incredibly difficult it is to send money and aid to family members.

Meanwhile, Russia and Venezuela have stepped in with massive amounts of aid. When the United States announced a \$1-billion aid package to Georgia, which was mentioned earlier, it sent a strong signal that America will fight Russian expansionism and stand with the population of a tiny country fighting for its life. Meanwhile, 90 miles away from our shores Russia has sent four cargo planes of humanitarian aid to Cuba, and is seeking to dramatically expand its presence on the island. Venezuela has also been generous in its aid to Cuba, and if we want to contain Russian expansionism, I would argue that \$100 million in public and especially private-sector aid to Cuba and the lifting of travel and family remittance restrictions will get us a bigger bang for our buck than \$1 billion in aid to Georgia.

The damage caused by the hurricanes should cause us to reexamine all of our policies to Cuba, a policy such as the ban on Cuban-Americans travel and remittances, so flagrantly contradicts American values of openness and compassion that the policy needs to be scrapped.

Thank you, and may God bless America, and grant Cuba the freedom it deserves.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sosa follows:]

Families Torn Apart: Human Rights and U.S. Restrictions on Cuban-American Travel
Statement for the Record

By

Ignacio Sosa

Member of the Executive Board of the Cuba Study Group

Before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Organizations,
Human Rights, and Oversight
September 18, 2008

Chairman Delahunt and distinguished members of the Committee, I am grateful to appear before this distinguished committee to discuss U.S. restrictions on Cuban-American travel.

I am an American who is grateful for the many opportunities this country has provided since I arrived on its shores 48 years ago on a lonely flight from Havana. I am also the son, brother, nephew and cousin of those who spent years in Fidel Castro's prisons. I admire President George W. Bush's principled advocacy for freedom in every corner of the world. I am also a lifelong Republican and admirer of both Presidents Bush. As a Republican, I am deeply concerned that my party's positions on Cuba will lead it to lose the votes of the only reliably Republican Hispanic group in the country; Cuban-Americans.

Ladies and gentlemen, maintaining restrictions on Cuban-American travel and family remittances risks more than just the Republicans losing the key electoral state of Florida. We as Americans are in danger of losing the moral high ground in our relations with Cuba. Increasing numbers of Cuban-Americans are calling for an end to US restrictions on travel and remittances to Cuba by Cuban-Americans. Indeed, data from a poll conducted in March 2007 by Florida International University has demonstrated that 60.2% of Cuban-Americans in South Florida support returning to the pre-2004 rules governing Cuban-American travel and remittances.¹ But even more important, almost all leading dissidents in Cuba today – even those who have been most supportive of U.S. policy in the past – have asked the U.S. government to lift travel and remittance restrictions applied to Cuban-Americans. The U.S. government does not restrict travel to any other country in the world, not even those on the State Department's list of State Sponsors of Terrorism.² Only in the case of Cuba does the U.S. government regulate the rights of persons to visit their families. This makes no sense.

¹ Poll conducted by Florida International University on April 2007.

² United States. U.S. Department of the Treasury. An Overview of O.F.A.C. Regulations Involving Sanctions against Iran. Washington: September 2006.

United States. U.S. Department of the Treasury. An overview of the Foreign Assets Control Regulations as the relate to North Korea. Washington: December 2007.

I am one of those Cuban-Americans who believe we should end all American restrictions on travel and remittances to Cuba by Cuban-Americans. Such limits are counterproductive because they increase the Cuban people's dependency on the Cuban government as the only source of employment and information. Limits on family travel and remittances work to destroy family values and represent the opposite of all that is great about the United States.

I have traveled to Cuba several times on humanitarian missions. I have met with Cubans throughout the island; students, pensioners, clergymen, factory workers, farmers, engineers, the homeless and several brave dissidents. I was greeted always with warmth and generosity as well as a barrage of questions on how the world outside Cuba works. I did my best to extol the virtues of a free society where the rule of law underpins the ability of each citizen to choose the life they want to lead. I never met one Cuban who was in favor of restrictions on Cuban-American travel and family remittances; not one.

Cuban-Americans traveling to Cuba are especially powerful agents for change. Their success in the United States serves as a compelling advertisement for what Cubans can accomplish if they are free to pursue their dreams and ambitions.

There are those who say that unfettered travel to Cuba by Europeans and Canadians has done little to advance change. This is disingenuous. The United States is home to the largest community of Cuban émigrés in the world. The impact of a Cuban-American visitor is much more powerful than that of say a German family on vacation. As a small government Republican, I also argue that it should not be up to bureaucrats in Washington to determine what kind of travel by Cuban-Americans is acceptable. Cuban-Americans are citizens of a free country and they should decide for themselves where they wish to travel.

The catastrophic damage wrought on Cuba by Hurricanes Ike and Gustav has brought to the forefront the damage caused by American restrictions on travel and family remittances to Cuba. Cuban-Americans are angry that those who espouse family values wish to prevent families in the United States from helping relatives in Cuba. I know from personal experience how incredibly difficult it is to send money to Cuban relatives who have lost their homes and are in desperate need of food, water and shelter. In many cases, it is virtually impossible.

Meanwhile, Russia and Venezuela have stepped-in with massive amounts of aid to counter the United States offer of \$100,000 in Cuban relief funds. When the United States government announced a \$1billion aid package to Georgia it sent a strong signal that America will fight Russian expansionism and stand with the population of a tiny country fighting for its life. Meanwhile, 90 miles from our shores, Russia has sent four cargo planes of humanitarian aid to Cuba and is seeking to dramatically expand its presence on the island. Venezuela has also been

See OFAC regulations: <http://www.treas.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/programs/index.shtml>
 See State Sponsors of Terrorism list: <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/c14151.htm>

generous in its aid to Cuba. If we want to contain Russian expansionism, I would argue that \$100mm in public and private sector aid to Cuba and the lifting of travel and family remittances restrictions will get us a bigger bang for our buck than \$1billion in aid to Georgia.

The damage caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike should cause us to re-examine all of our policies toward Cuba. A policy such as the ban on Cuban-American travel and remittances so flagrantly contradicts American values of openness and compassion that the policy needs to be scrapped.

Thank you and may God bless America and grant Cuba the freedom it deserves.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you, Mr. Sosa. Ms. Iriondo.

**STATEMENT OF MS. SYLVIA IRIONDO, PRESIDENT, MOTHERS
AGAINST REPRESSION (M.A.R. POR CUBA)**

Ms. IRIONDO. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee. I am most grateful for this opportunity to speak on such an important issue for me.

Today, Cuba is facing two monumental disasters: The natural disaster caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, and the manmade disaster brought about by nearly 50 years of totalitarian rule and neglect under a brutal dictatorship intent on remaining in power at all costs and responsible for the thousands of Cuban families torn apart.

The devastation caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike stretches across the island, from east to west, and north to south. The damage inflicted by the force of these powerful hurricanes requires nothing short of massive disaster relief assistance. The United States Government has generously offered to provide massive humanitarian assistance to the victims, but the Cuban regime, incapable of addressing the needs of the Cuban people, has repeatedly rejected United States offers. Instead, they are demanding the suspension, at least temporarily, of the trade embargo so that they may buy from U.S. companies on credit. The only one that stands to gain from easing restrictions is the Cuban regime.

The tragedy that the Cuban people face in the aftermath of Gustav and Ike should not be utilized as yet another argument to promote the partial, total or temporary lifting of restrictions, nor should it be used to advance a political agenda in the upcoming U.S. elections.

The situation in Cuba is such that even if the travel restrictions were lifted little would be accomplished in terms of providing the massive assistance the Cuban people need. Of the Cubans residing in the United States, not many would be able to travel immediately given the required documentation and the high fees that are charged.

Families are torn apart and will remain so, but not by the United States sanctions, but by the actions of the Cuban regime. The lifting of travel restrictions would result in a selective process

feasible only for those who have financial possibility and beneficial only for those Cubans with relatives in the United States.

Should the restrictions be lifted, the Cuban regime would generate a considerable amount of additional resources which, as time and history have proven, would be used to increase repression against the civic resistance movement and to solidify the regime's stay in power, denying the freedom Cuban people have struggled so hard for so long during almost half a century under the yoke of oppression.

Lost in the din of the debate are the reasons for which these sanctions were rightly instituted and why they must remain in place.

The 2004 sanctions were imposed following the March 2003 violent wave of repression that resulted in the arbitrary arrests, summary trials, prison sentences of up to 28 years for more than 75 human rights and pro-democracy activists, and the execution by firing squad of three young men who attempted to flee Cuba.

Today, over 50 of this group of prisoners still remain in prison under inhumane conditions. Restrictions facilitate a process of internal democratization to aid Cuba's opposition movement channel the aspirations for change of an overwhelming majority of the Cuban people.

Proponents of the lifting of sanctions insist that the restrictions serve to keep Cuban families torn apart. Not so. Families torn apart are the parents of those United States citizens who were shot down by Cuban Air Force MIGs on February 24, 1996, while conducting a humanitarian search and rescue flight in international air space in the Florida Straits to save Cubans fleeing the island in fragile rafts. I know because I was there. I was aboard the only plane that made it back home that day.

Families torn apart are the relatives and children of political prisoners who cannot have their loved ones at home. Families torn apart are the victims of crimes continually perpetrated by this regime, such as the massacre of the "13th of March Tugboat" on July 13, 1994.

Those are families torn apart by a ruthless regime that aims to control every aspect of its citizens' lives and tramples upon inalienable God-given rights.

Regrettably, Cuba's regime continues to refuse humanitarian assistance from the United States. It is not the time to unilaterally lift these sanctions, but the time to exert international pressure on the regime to allow humanitarian assistance to reach all the Cuban people, 11 million of them, and to stand with the people of Cuba in their unwavering determination to be free.

Freedom has a price. Many Cubans, including some here, have been willing to pay that price with their lives and their best years in prison.

Mr. Chairman and members of this subcommittee: It is not U.S. law that needs to be changed. It is the Cuban regime. Thank you. [The prepared statement of Ms. Iriondo follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MS. SYLVIA IRIONDO, PRESIDENT, MOTHERS AGAINST REPRESSION (M.A.R. POR CUBA)

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. I am most grateful for this opportunity to speak on such an important issue as the one that

brings us together for this hearing, "Families Torn Apart: Human Rights and U.S. Restrictions on Cuban American Travel."

Today, Cuba is facing two monumental disasters:

the natural disasters caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike which battered the island over a three-week period; and,

the man-made disaster brought about by nearly 50 years of totalitarian rule and neglect under a brutal dictatorship intent on remaining in power at all costs and responsible for the thousands of Cuban families that have been torn apart and subjected to systematic human rights violations.

The devastation caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike stretches across the island—from east to west and north to south:

more than 444,000 homes were damaged, another 63,249 were destroyed;

more than 2,500 schools are totally or partially damaged;

Pinar del Rio province alone lost 137 electrical towers, 4,500 electrical posts and 530 transformers;

4,355 tons of food in warehouses and stores were lost;

Western Cuba saw damage to 314 medical facilities, including 16 hospitals, 18 clinics and 191 doctors' offices;

Almost 80,000 acres of plantains were lost and 25,000 acres of other products

The damage inflicted by the force of these powerful hurricanes requires nothing short of massive disaster relief assistance. The U.S. government has generously offered to provide massive humanitarian assistance to meet the most urgent needs of the victims. But the Cuban regime—incapable of addressing the needs and demands of the Cuban people—has repeatedly rejected U.S. offers. Instead, they are demanding the suspension, at least temporarily, of the trade embargo so that they may buy from U.S. companies on credit.

A move such as this one would not be fair to the Cuban people, those truly suffering the brunt of the hurricanes' force. The only one that stands to gain from easing the trade embargo is the Cuban regime. And as Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez has noted: the Cuban regime is "behind on payments to most of its creditors."

Long-time advocates for appeasement with Havana's regime have activated intense campaigns against the embargo, while a few others believe that the temporary lifting of restrictions—on both family remittances and Cuban American travel to the island—will benefit Cuba's families.

The tragedy that the Cuban people face in the aftermath of Gustav and Ike should not be utilized as an argument to promote the partial, total or temporary lifting of restrictions, which were designed to help bring about democratic change in Cuba. Nor should it be used to advance a political agenda in the upcoming U.S. elections.

Those who advocate the lifting of sanctions argue that this would facilitate person-to-person assistance in this dire time of need. However, the situation in Cuba is such that even if the travel restrictions were lifted little would be accomplished in terms of providing the massive assistance the Cuban people need—roofs, houses, food, crops, livestock and medicine, among many more.

We must also keep in mind that travel to Cuba by Cubans residing in the U.S. is regulated by the Cuban regime, which charges exorbitant costs. And that Cuba lacks the infrastructure necessary to accommodate the additional influx of visitors.

Of the thousands of Cubans residing in the U.S., not many would be able to travel immediately given the required documentation and the high fees charged by the agencies accredited to process travel to Cuba. For many others, the Cuban regime will not grant them permission to enter Cuba.

Those families are torn apart—and will remain so—but not by the U.S. sanctions, but by the actions of the Cuban regime.

A lifting of travel restrictions would result in a selective process—feasible only for those U.S. residents who have financial flexibility and beneficial only for those Cubans with relatives living stateside. It would serve only to foster increased segregation and abuses against those 11 million Cubans living on the island.

By helping a select few, we would create a situation that pits Cubans who have relatives abroad against those who don't—something that no Cuban wants to see in this time of need.

Should the restrictions be lifted, the Cuban regime would generate a considerable amount of additional resources which, as time and history have proven, would be used to increase repression against the civic resistance movement and to solidify the regime's stay in power at the expense of the Cuban people. It would only serve to

minimize the impact of this tragedy which requires massive humanitarian assistance.

Lost in the din of the debate are the reasons for which these sanctions were rightly instituted and why they must remain in place.

The 2004 sanctions—including restrictions on Cuban American travel to the island—were imposed following the March 2003 violent wave of repression that resulted in the arbitrary arrests, summary trials, prison sentences of up to 28 years for more than 75 pro-democracy leaders, independent journalists and human rights activists; and the execution by firing squad of three young men who attempted to flee Cuba aboard a stolen ferry boat.

As of today, 25 of the men and women incarcerated in 2003 have been released. Another 50 remain in prison, held under inhumane conditions—isolated cells infested by rats, inadequate sanitary facilities, rancid food and the absence of critical medical care.

The mother of one of those political prisoners is with us in the audience. She is Blanca Gonzalez and her son is Normando Hernandez, an independent journalist sentenced to 25 years in prison for daring to speak out in favor of human rights and freedom. Normando is very sick and the Cuban regime continues to deny him the medical care he urgently requires.

Does Blanca feel that the lifting of U.S. restrictions on Cuban American travel and other sanctions will benefit Cuban families? Let me submit her response for the record: “There are 11 million Cubans on the island, the majority of which do not have relatives abroad. There are also nearly 300 political prisoners in Cuba that we know of. We need to help all of them. I am against lifting restrictions that will have no impact on the well-being of the Cuban nation as a whole and will be used by the regime for political gain. The only restrictions that need to be lifted are those imposed by the regime upon the fundamental freedoms and rights of the Cuban people.”

Since the restrictions were imposed, the economic resources that the regime needs to carry out massive repression such as the one carried out against Blanca's son have been affected, keeping hard currency away from Cuba's repressive state police and military apparatus. As a result of these restrictions, the regime has been unable to undertake a similar operation since the March 18th crackdown and the Cuban civic resistance has steadily grown.

The purpose of these restrictions was to erode the regime's ability to repress, while facilitating a process of internal democratization to aid Cuba's pro-democracy movement channel the aspirations for change of an overwhelming majority of the Cuban people.

Proponents of the lifting of sanctions insist that the restrictions serve to keep Cuban families torn apart.

Families torn apart are the parents of the U.S. citizens and resident who were shot down by Cuban Air Force MiGs on February 24, 1996 while conducting a Brothers to the Rescue search and rescue flight in international airspace in the Florida Straits to save Cubans fleeing the island.

Families torn apart are the relatives and children of political prisoners who cannot have their loved ones at home.

Families torn apart are the victims of crimes continually perpetrated by this regime, such as the massacre of the 13th of March Tugboat on July 13, 1994, among others.

Those are some of the families torn apart by a ruthless regime that aims to control every aspect of its citizens' lives and tramples upon inalienable God-given rights.

Current U.S. laws and regulations provide the mechanisms to send humanitarian assistance to the victims in Cuba through non governmental organizations with appropriate licenses. In fact, the U.S. is the number one provider of humanitarian assistance to Cuba. Regrettably, Cuba's regime continues to refuse massive humanitarian assistance from the United States. It is not the time to unilaterally lift these sanctions, but the time to stand together as one and exert international pressure on the regime to allow humanitarian assistance to reach the Cuban people. To do otherwise in the midst of a national emergency would be a grave mistake.

It is not U.S. law that needs to be changed; it's the Cuban regime.

Thank-you!

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you. Ms. Pérez Castellón

**STATEMENT OF MS. NINOSKA PÉREZ CASTELLÓN, BOARD
MEMBER, CUBAN LIBERTY COUNCIL**

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. Yes, Mr. Chairman. I would like to submit my statement and respond to some of the things that have been said here today.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Without objection.

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. You talk about legislation and I wonder if this will include an illegal immigrant who come to the United States and cannot travel 1 or 2 or 3 years because they simply cannot leave the United States, or many of the Cubans who came here and claimed they were politically persecuted and then within a year's time, taking the Cuban Adjustment Act into account, they go back as if nothing happened after having lied to the U.S. Government.

So, I do not understand because, for example, 2 years ago when you went to Cuba in 2006, and Raul Castro had just been named successor without elections, and I wonder if we would have accepted Pinochet's brother to take over. You said that it was a new era. Well, Raul Castro had just been named successor. The new era is the same dictatorship with a new face, another Castro at the helm, and they are still enslaving the Cuban people. So, I do not understand.

Yesterday you were questioning aid to Georgia because you said it is not a democratic regime. Do not those families count?

And I have heard here that sanctions do not work. What put an end to South Africa's racist regime? I remember black lists when American artists could not even go back, or we could do what Congressman LaHood said, let us do business with China. Let us get cheap goods and let us get cheap labor, but let squash some skulls and trample upon human rights.

You said that is—some things you said were un-American. You know what is un-American? To serve as apologist for dictators.

And I do not understand Congressman Ron Paul said that people over 50 at the debate. Well, you know what? It was at the University of Miami, and half of the tickets were given out to students. I do not recall those students being over 50, and if that were to apply then perhaps all of you should retire and your staffers should take over.

And you ask about moral authority. Who gave the United States the moral authority to wage war against Hitler when Jews were being massacred in Cuba? And you constantly talk about—I am sorry.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I appreciate your passion, but let me interrupt for one moment and point out to you that what we are talking about here is restrictions on family travel.

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. Well, restrictions of family travel.

Mr. DELAHUNT. And I would like to make a point right now. Are you aware, are you aware that there were no restrictions on Germans, German-Americans to go back to Nazi Germany until the war broke out?

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. No, there were apologists who permitted Hitler to massacre 6 million Jews.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I fail to find—I fail to find that connection. I am going to give you additional time. But let us understand, let us make this factual.

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. Factual.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Okay? Let us stick to the facts, and the fact is you made a reference to Nazi Germany.

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. Yes.

Mr. DELAHUNT. And the government at the time, okay, the United States Government at the time did not impose restrictions—

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. But what I—

Mr. DELAHUNT [continuing]. On family travel—

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. But what I refer to—

Mr. DELAHUNT [continuing]. So that German-Americans could return to take care of their families and maybe assist them in leaving.

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. Right. What I referred to were people who apologized for Hitler and allowed the 6 million Jews to die.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Who is apologizing for Hitler?

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. Some people apologize and it lasted—

Mr. DELAHUNT. Who? Can you name them? Who was apologizing for Hitler?

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. Let us go back to travel restrictions. When Cubans could travel before 2003, what did that solve? I do not know that it solved anything. Cuba depends on tourism, and it was clear when Castro said they did not want any aid, and that tourism is handled by the armed forces, and I do not understand when I see those sanctions were imposed, when 75 men and women were arrested.

I saw Hector Palacios speak here today. Well, Hector Palacios was able to leave Cuba. He was able to return. But you know what? Her son is still in prison and 59 of those men for whom those travel restrictions were in place are still in prison. Why are we not asking the Cuban regime to release those political prisoners before we lift those sanctions?

I would like to remind this panel that this is the same regime that harbors fugitives of U.S. justice, that has imprisoned thousands of men and women, that has killed American citizens in international air space, that has sunk tugboats in the Bay of Havana with children on board, and the survivors have testified of that horrible crime before this committee.

And in May 2001, before an audience of American haters at the University of Tehran, Fidel Castro, to the shout of war from the fanatics in the audience threatened that the Governments of Cuba and Iran could bring the United States to its knees. Four months later Americans woke to the horrors of September 11, and today Fidel Castro's brain child, Hugo Chavez, continues subverting the continent.

I do not understand how travel restrictions are being used not now by the same people that have requested the lifting of the embargo and the lifting of sanctions. Cuba needs to change. It is not the U.S. policy. It is the Cuban Government. The Cuban Government has to release political prisoners. The Cuban Government has to hold free and democratic elections, and the Cuban Government

has to respect human rights, and then perhaps sanctions could be lifted.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Castellón follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MS. NINOSKA PÉREZ CASTELLÓN, BOARD MEMBER, CUBAN LIBERTY COUNCIL

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of this Committee, thank you for the invitation to testify before you today.

This hearing has limited its focus on the lifting of travel restrictions which I would like to remind this Committee, were imposed on Cuba's military regime in 2004 after the massive arrests which sent to prison 75 men and women, members of Cuba's peaceful opposition.

Let me begin by stating some facts: Three days before the arrival of hurricane Gustave, Cuba's Central Bank advised its creditors that its external debt for 2007 had increased \$1,100 million dollars of the already existing \$16,500 million, which of course they were unwilling to pay. It is a fact that Cuba's economy was in ruins before the arrival of hurricanes Gustav and Ike, not because of an embargo from the United States. But because of the ineptitude of a regime that despite a huge subsidy from the Soviet Union which lasted for decades, spent it, not for the benefit of the Cuban people, but rather on repression and the financing and training of subversive groups, which make no mistake, are still spreading violence around the world today.

Another fact, on three occasions now Cuba has refused the generous offer of humanitarian aid from the US. It initially said that no DART team would be allowed because no other countries had made the same requests. Their statements were clearly misleading because at the same time they were saying this, Venezuelan and Mexican inspectors were in Cuba evaluating the damages. In their refusal of humanitarian aid from the United States, they include and were apparently pleased by Barak Obama's politically motivated request for the suspension of travel sanctions during 90 days. Last but not least, they stated they would not accept donations, but certainly the lifting of the embargo for a period of six months so that they could obtain credits. That is the key word, credits so that they can determine what to buy, and who it goes to. Credit that they will not pay back, just as they have not paid any of their existing and long list of creditors. Only this time U.S. taxpayers will end up bearing the burden.

Many of us do not understand why some Members are considering the lifting of sanctions to a regime that has not shown the least interest in releasing political prisoners, showing respect for human rights or holding free and democratic elections after 48 years of Fidel Castro's iron rule? When Congressman Delahunt visited Cuba in December 2006, he called it "a new era." Raul Castro had just been named successor *without elections*. Two years later, the "new era" is the same dictatorship, only with a different Castro at the helm, still enslaving the Cuban people.

Don't the Cuban people deserve the same inalienable rights other free nations enjoy or is the United States Congress going to allow itself to become an accomplice to a dictatorship that has failed its people yet again and now in their darkest hour?

But let's go back to the facts for a moment. Family travel, considering the high cost of passport and fare to Cuba *is not a solution to the needs of eleven million Cubans*, of which a large majority, does not have relatives abroad. Who will care for those which remain hostages of an irresponsible government that has not and cannot guarantee them their basic needs in this time of tragedy?

Those who are here today advocating for the lifting of sanctions, should instead be urging the international community to pressure the regime into accepting the free aid by the United States and distributed by reputable international organizations as was the case of Burma? The United States Congress should be standing by the side of the victims, and not wanting to embolden the victimizers. It is demagoguery to preach that relatives will be able to afford the high cost of travel, not to mention that the lack of infrastructure in Cuba makes it practically impossible for even disaster experts to reach the remote and devastated areas throughout the island. And it is unrealistic to think that relatives will be able to carry construction materials which for that matter, are already permitted under the Agriculture Exception and Cuba can purchase from the U.S.

Unfortunately, some of those who now claim they want to travel to Cuba as often as possible, are the same who misled our government when arriving to our shores brought in by smuggling rings on speed boats, or who cross the Mexican border and fill out asylum petitions, alleging persecution benefiting from the Cuban Adjustment

Act and within a year's time after obtaining their permanent residence, are back in Cuba as visitors.

Lifting the travel ban will not solve the problems of eleven million Cubans. It will only reward a Regime that has shown no willingness to change. Even during this time of suffering.

It is ironic that some of those prisoners, members of the 75, for whose arrests the travel sanctions were imposed, have been released only to advocate for the lifting of those same sanctions. We should take a moment today to remember that *over 50* of those 75 still remain in prison today under inhuman conditions. Normando Hernandez is one of the 75, his mother joins us here today, and her message is clear: do not bail out a regime that is holding her son captive.

The Cuban people today are no different from hostages held by Colombia's FARC. They are captives of a rogue government that has been unable to provide and care for them. Don't give in to the victimizers or the economic interests of a travel industry that exploits and feeds on families who are torn, not by policy but by a ruthless dictatorship. There are eleven million Cubans who are suffering the consequences of 50 years of abuse by this Regime. Travel to Cuba, before the 2004 policy changes did not bring about democratic reform as Congressman Delahunt claims.

This is the same regime that for years has harbored fugitives of U.S. justice, the same regime that has imprisoned thousands of men and women, the same regime that has killed American citizens in international airspace, the same regime that has sunk tugboats in the bay of Havana with children on board, the survivors of the horrible crime testified before this same Committee. In May of 2001, before an audience of American haters at the University of Teheran, Fidel Castro, to the chant of war, war, from the fanatics in the audience, threatened that the governments of Cuba and Iran could bring the United States to it's knees. Four months later the American people awoke to the horrors of September 11. Today, Fidel Castro's brainchild Hugo Chavez is subverting order in the continent.

The Cuban people need solidarity to put and end to 50 years of tyranny, they do not need the Congress of the United States to give economic support to the tyrant that oppresses them.

Adolf Hitler was able to murder 6 million Jews, while apologists found excuses to justify his crimes. It is no different in Cuba. The Castro regime wants the lifting of family travel to eventually, and they expressed it as such, obtain the lifting of tourism travel to Cuba. Will that benefit the Cuban people? No it will benefit the regime and especially the Armed Forces who run the tourism industry. Cuba needs solidarity, not apologists.

Mr Chairman, Cuba, the country I was born in, is devastated, as I testify here today the destruction will not be solved by lifting sanctions, but by international pressure to accept massive humanitarian aid and I urge you to use the power of your Committee to also pressure Cuban Authorities to accept this much needed aid. Please, do not ignore the "ever approaching sound of thunder" that as Anne Frank warned from her loneliness, eventually would destroy her.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you, Ms. Pérez Castellón. I would also note that other individuals who were incarcerated as a result of what is described as the Black Spring, people like Oscar Espinosa Chepe, who happens to be a friend of mine whom I visit every time that I go to Cuba, and his wife, Miriam Leiva, who was one of the founders of the—I am trying to say this in Spanish—La Damas Blanco.

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. Damas de Blanco.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Okay. Also have communicated with me that family travel is extremely important, not to aid and assist the Cuban Government, but to encourage those on the island who are in opposition, and they have paid the price. It is easy for you and for me to be here in Washington or to be here in Miami. They have served their time as Mr. Hernández has—

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. Fifty-nine others are still in prison.

Mr. DELAHUNT. And I—

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. Of those 75.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Let us be very clear.

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. They are free, the other 59 are—

Mr. DELAHUNT. Let us be very, very clear. There is nobody on this panel that will not make an effort to advocate for their release as well. I can assure you of that. And another individual who has spent time in a Cuban prison is Dr. Hernández.

Doctor, would you please make your statement?

**STATEMENT OF FRANCISCO J. HERNÁNDEZ, PH.D.,
PRESIDENT, CUBAN AMERICAN NATIONAL FOUNDATION**

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. Thank you very much.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Could you hit the button? You have got to hit that button.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the committee. I would like to submit also my complete testimony for the record.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Without objection.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. Thank you. And my name, as you have said, is Francisco Hernández, and I am the President of the Cuban American National Foundation, and you have mentioned part of my record, and in order to perhaps be more explicit on it, let me say that I left Cuba after working for about a year in the underground and early in 1959, my father was actually arrested, was tried, sentenced, and executed in 24 hours by the courts of—the kangaroo courts in Cuba.

So, I have also visited these room many times, and I remember in looking at those two great men that their portraits that hang on the walls, that they helped us tremendously, and many of the fights were won against the Castro regime over the years because of the work of Dante Fascell and Henry Hyde.

So, as you can see, Mr. Chairman, I am not a Castro sympathizer. Thereby my dismay at having to defend, not in Cuba, not against the Castro regime, but in the halls of the Congress of the United States the right of Cuban-Americans families to support and protect each other, especially in times of peril.

Mr. Chairman, this is not about sanctions. This is not about Fidel Castro or Raul Castro. The right of human families to support each other predates the establishment of human societies and human governments. The rights are inalienable, and as such should be protected, not interfered with by governments, whether they are the U.S. Government, or the Castro regime.

For that reason the Cuban American National Foundation firmly opposed the restrictions imposed by the present administration in the year 2004. These restrictions were not on the Cuban Government. These restrictions were directly on the Cuban people.

Mr. Chairman, these restrictions are not only inhumane but they are also counterproductive to our desire to uplift the Cuban people in their struggle for democracy and clearly reveal the utter hypocrisy of a policy that prohibits families from helping one another, yet facilitates trade and travel to American businessmen looking to make a profit.

I have not seen yet anybody talk about the fact that the Bush administration has authorized \$2.6 billion in trade with Cuba, and Cuban families cannot send more than \$100 a week to their families in Cuba.

Mr. Chairman, Cuban-Americans now more than ever must become agents of change inside the island, and fill the gap the Castro government has created by not responding to the present crisis.

I had the opportunity to talk to an activist, human rights activist in Los Tunas Province, just after the pass of the Ike Hurricane, and he said to me, for the first time in my life, for about 4 days I have not seen one Cuban officer around here, whether a member of a Communist Party or a member of the municipality, whatever, or a military man. This is the vacuum that the Cuban Government have left, and that vacuum must be filled, and there is nobody else that can fill that vacuum at the present time than the families and the brothers and sisters of the Cubans that are suffering at the present time.

In the coming weeks with the Cuban Government unable and unwilling to confront these crisis, disease and malnutrition may spread, and the desperation of a people who feel helpless and forgotten will reach the point where, as it has occurred in the past, thousands will see no other alternative than to attempt the desperate journey to American shores, placing their lives, and our national security at risk.

As this crisis unfolds, Mr. Chairman, we will be holding back because of this absurd restriction the efforts a resources of over 400,000 Cubans who have arrived in the United States in the last 10 years, and who have immediate relatives on the island. What would any of us do in their situation? What would you do, Mr. Chairman, if your mother had lost their house or your children did not have anything to eat? What would any of us do?

Surely the insanity of these restrictions will drive many of those 400,000 Cubans in south Florida and throughout the United States to resort to all kinds of illegal and risky schemes in order to help their families. And who could blame them?

There is no question that the primary responsibility of responding to this crisis belongs to the Cuban regime, yet they have dismally failed at providing emergency aid to their own people. They do not feel compelled to act because their primary concern is not the well being of their people, but their ability to remain in power. We have borne witness to this over the course of 50 years as they place innocent men and women before the firing squads and force one-fifth of Cuba's population into exile.

Make no mistake, Mr. Chairman. This was true during Fidel Castro's reign and it will continue to be true under Raul Castro, and they are not going to reply to the offer, the very generous offer of the United States because what they want is to continue to control the Cuban people. They do not want the interference of the United States.

But we have to find ways in which we can break that total control of the government over the Cuban people, and the only way we can break that control is opening and making Cuban-Americans agents of change within the island at the present time. This is our opportunity actually, and it is the opportunity of the Cuban people. We cannot continue to maintain our families and the families of those who are in Cuba completely separated and unable to help there because nobody else is going to help them. Nobody else is going to do what has to be done.

In the face of dealing with the regime that completely disregards the well being of its own people and has turned down, as I said before, the aid from the United States Government, the Cuban-American community stands anxious to assist our brethren on the island.

In an attempt to get direct aid to hurricane victims, the Cuban American National Foundation requested and was granted a license by the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the Department of Treasury in less than 2 days. The response was so overwhelming that we met the ceiling of our 250,000 license, and were forced to put the program on hold while we wait approval of an additional license.

In a matter of hours over 1200—

Mr. DELAHUNT. Wrap it up, Mr. Hernández.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. Yes.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I am going to have to give some extra time when we do Q&As to our other witnesses.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. Correct. So to end, this is the opportunity that we have to help Cuba and the Cuban people. First get sufficient independence from the government in order to do things by themselves, to help the opposition inside Cuba which cannot be helped by the person tied by anybody in the United States because they are not direct families or immediate families of that opposition, and the 59 members that do not have families here in the United States and are in prison at the present time of the Black Spring in Havana cannot be helped. You cannot send them a \$1,000.

So I ask of you and the Members of the Congress of the United States please help the Cuban people by lifting these restrictions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hernández follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF FRANCISCO J. HERNÁNDEZ, PH.D., PRESIDENT, CUBAN AMERICAN NATIONAL FOUNDATION

Thank you Chairman Delahunt, Ranking Member Rohrabacher and distinguished members of the Committee for allowing me the privilege to testify before you today in support of H.R. 757, the 'Cuban-American Family Rights Restoration Act'.

My name is Francisco José Hernández, I am the President of the Cuban American National Foundation. I celebrated my seventy-second birthday only two weeks ago. Forty-nine of those years I have spent in a frontal struggle against the Castro revolution. Only three months after being in power, Che Guevara himself ordered the execution of my father after a Kangaroo trial that lasted only four hours condemning him to death. I participated in the Bay of Pigs invasion, was imprisoned in Cuba and after returning to the United States was granted a commission as a second lieutenant in the USMC by express orders of President John F. Kennedy. When asked by the Review Board why I had selected the Marines, I replied, "I want to be of the first to land back in Cuba". That was not to be, but later, along with Jorge Mas Canosa, I fought relentlessly to strengthen sanctions against the Castro regime and as recently as last May, Fidel Castro in one of his "reflections" criticized Senator Barack Obama for sitting beside me, the man he accuses, falsely, of plotting against his life, at the annual luncheon of the Cuban American National Foundation.

As you can see, Mr. Chairman, I am no Castro sympathizer, thereby my dismay at having to defend, not in Cuba, not against the Castro regime, but in the halls of the Congress of the United States, the right of Cuban-American families to comfort, support and protect each other, to be together in times of happiness and in times of sorrow, in times of wellness and in times of peril.

Mr. Chairman, the right of human families to support each other pre-dates the establishment of human societies and human governments. Their rights are inalienable and as such, should be protected, not interfered with, by governments, whether it is the government of the United States, or the Cuban regime. For that reason, the Cuban American National Foundation firmly opposed the restrictions imposed

by the present Administration in the year 2004, limiting remittances to immediate family members and reducing family travel to once every three years.

Mr. Chairman, these restrictions are not only inhumane but they are also counterproductive to our desire to uplift the Cuban people in their struggle for democracy and clearly reveal the utter hypocrisy of a policy that prohibits families from helping one another yet facilitates trade and travel to American businessmen looking to make a profit.

Mr. Chairman, while we sit here deliberating on the shortcomings of the US-Cuba policy, just miles off the coast of Florida, the Cuban people are facing a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions, exacerbated by a regime impervious to the pain and suffering of its people. Hurricane's Gustav and Ike have caused massive devastation throughout Cuba—entire towns have disappeared, over 500,000 families have lost their homes, and several million Cubans are without water or electricity, unable to meet even their most basic needs. In the coming weeks, with a Cuban government unable and unwilling to confront the crisis, disease and malnutrition may spread and the desperation of a people who feel helpless and forgotten will reach the point where, as in the past, thousands will see no other alternative than to attempt the desperate journey to America's shores placing their lives and our national security at risk.

As this crisis unfolds, Mr. Chairman, we will be holding back, because of these asinine restrictions, the efforts and resources of over 400,000 Cubans who have arrived in the United States in the last ten years and who have immediate relatives on island. What would any of us do in their situation? Would we not answer the plight of our mother whose house has been destroyed or our children with no place to sleep or no food to eat? I know I would do whatever I needed to. Surely, the insanity of these restrictions will drive many of those 400,000 Cubans in South Florida and throughout the United States to resort to all kinds of illegal and risky schemes in order to help their families.

There is no question that the primary responsibility of responding to this growing crisis belongs to the Cuban regime, yet they have dismally failed at providing emergency aid to their own people. Their lack of action is indefensible yet not surprising—we have seen that in times of crisis they shrink into the shadows leaving the Cuban people to fend for themselves or as Cubans say "*resolver*". They do not feel compelled to act because their primary concern is not the well being of their people but their ability to remain in power. We have born witness to this over the course of 50 years as they placed innocent men and women before firing squads, as they've forced one fifth of Cuba's population into exile, and as they continue to lock away thousands of its bravest citizens in dark, torturous cells simply for speaking freely. Make no mistake, this was true under Fidel and will remain to be true under Raul Castro.

In the face of dealing with a regime that completely disregards the well-being of its own people and has turned down aid from the United States Government, the Cuban-American community stands anxious to assist our brethren on the Island. In an attempt to get direct aid to hurricane victims, the Cuban American National Foundation requested and was granted a license by the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the Department of Treasury. In less than two days, the response was so overwhelming that we met the ceiling of our \$250,000 license and were forced to put the program on hold while we await approval for an additional license. In a matter of hours, over 1,200 families in the most affected areas received an average of \$200, equivalent to more than a year's salary in Cuban pesos. This is the power of self-help, the power of person to person assistance, family to family support, a power that we must unleash, rather than chain down.

Mr. Chairman, it is indefensible and intolerable that this issue be used to play politics while lives hang in the balance and while the ability to assist exists. I must confess that as a Cuban-American I feel ashamed that members of my own community, even in the face of this terrible crisis, continue to lobby the Administration and this Congress to forbid Cubans from helping fellow Cubans. That is why I am here today to urge you to find a way to suspend these restrictions on a permanent or a temporary basis. While we cannot force the Castro regime into providing a quick and even response to this crisis, we can unleash the goodwill and humanitarian support that the Cuban American community is eager to provide. Let us not fail the Cuban people once again. Thank you.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you, Dr. Hernández. Mr. Peters.

**STATEMENT OF MR. PHILIP PETERS, VICE PRESIDENT,
LEXINGTON INSTITUTE**

Mr. PETERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is good to be with you, and I am particularly honored to be on this panel with these fine people here.

We are talking about Cuba today in a context that is unlike the context that we have known for all these years. It is a context of tremendous devastation because of the hurricanes that went through and great suffering that is taking place, and economic destruction which we have documented in our statements, and I think that the test for governments in a circumstance like this is to put politics aside and to do all we can to help the people who are victims of these disasters.

I want to praise the Bush administration. I think that President Bush and his people have done that. I think they could do more, but certainly these offers that they have made and the fact that the President and his representatives have pulled back on conditions that we originally set, I think those are signs of good faith, and I am glad that our Government is making these offers. I think it is deeply regrettable that the Cuban Government has not found a way to accept those offers and I think, if I may venture to say this, it is probably incumbent on people like us who have had conversations and have conversations with Cuban Government officials to encourage them to accept these good faith offers that are coming out of the Bush administration.

I hope for the future that the door remains open and I do not want to be too definitive in what I say because I want to be optimistic that maybe the diplomats on both sides can work something out, or that the United States can contribute to the kind of multilateral effort that is going to be needed.

This hearing started off on a very high plain with Mr. Rohrabacher and Mr. McCotter invoking all these moral considerations and all of that, and I wanted to touch on that briefly if I could. It was nice that Congressman McCotter stipulated to everybody's good intentions in the room and I would like to stipulate to the fact that everybody has the same views of the nature of the Government of Cuba, all of us in the room do. I do not think there is any disagreement about that.

I think foreign policy would be a very simple proposition if all it consisted of is making a moral judgment about the nature of a foreign government. It would be really simple. We would be breaking relations and we would be cutting off contact not just with Cuba but with dozens of countries all around the world. But of course that is not what it is about.

There are practical and prudential judgments that are involved too, and Mr. Rohrabacher invoked President Reagan. We can invoke President Nixon's action with regard to China, President Ford's action with regard to Eastern Europe, President Reagan's actions with regard to Eastern Europe and exchanges and all kinds of contact with the Soviet Union. Those are entirely contrary to the judgments that some, underscore some, of the Republican colleagues voiced today, and I do not think President Nixon, Ford or Reagan were morally blind. They were asserting our interests, and they saw that contact was an element of American strength and

openness is a strength of ours, not a liability that we need to regulate.

Getting back to the family sanctions issue, again in the context of doing all we can to help the people, I think it is clear that multi-lateral aid is necessary. It is clear that very large-scale efforts are necessary, but just because those relief efforts are going to proceed why should we hold back family members from helping their loved ones? There is nothing that could be more direct and more effective than a family member coming to help out or sending money to help out.

We were treated yesterday to a truly absurd statement, I would even call it pathetic, by our Secretary of Commerce who is Cuban-American, and who sort of invoked some kind of authority as a Cuban-American, but he said that he hears from people in Cuba that they do not need money because there is nothing to spend it on. What an astounding statement. I mean, one almost does not know where to begin.

There are stores in Cuba where people can buy things. People can buy things to repair their houses. They can buy appliances. There is a black market, which is a fact of life in Cuba, and obviously it is not a perfect system, but the idea that somebody in need, and especially somebody in the kind of need that they are in now, would not want their purchasing power to be increased by having a relative send them money is just absolutely absurd.

You know, how could people help? One aspect of our sanctions goes all the way to the contents of packages that people can send, and it is illegal now for a Cuban-American to take a box and put some clothing in it and some seeds in it, and personal hygiene items for somebody whose house has been completely wiped out, and whose garden has been blow to smithereens. You cannot do that.

If their house is okay, but their refrigerator was flooded, a Cuban-American cannot send money to go buy a new refrigerator, or some guys in Miami who would want to go repair their aunt's roof, they cannot do that, and someone from let us say Bergenline Avenue in New Jersey who wants to go find his mom because he cannot locate her, and her phone is out. If he went last year, he would have to wait until 2010.

Why in the world would the United States stand in the way of things like that?

There are many points to bring up on that score but I will just finish on the issue of the dissidents in Cuba. Just like we Republicans who show a capacity to show different points of view, sure, the dissidents disagree on different things, but in my estimation there are three major networks of them. There is the one led by Martha Beatriz Roque, and she for some time now has been against all of these family sanctions. She was back in May on a video conference with President Bush and with Secretary Gutierrez for that matter, and she called for these family sanctions to be gotten rid of so Cuban-Americans could send packages, could send remittances, cash aid, and visit their family more often, and she has called on President Bush specifically in the context of this natural disaster.

Oswaldo Paya who challenged the government with a petition drive, the same thing. Hector Palacios' wife who was the leader until she left Cuba of the library movement.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Peters, could you begin to wrap up.

Mr. PETERS. So I submit that we should not just invoke the cause of those people or appropriate millions of dollars to support their case, we should also listen to them and heed their word. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Peters follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MR. PHILIP PETERS, VICE PRESIDENT, LEXINGTON
INSTITUTE

Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to address the issue of U.S. sanctions that limit Cuban American visits and aid to their family members in Cuba.

I oppose all restrictions on American travel to Cuba, and I strongly oppose the extra restrictions placed in 2004 on Cuban Americans who want to visit their loved ones or send them cash remittances or gift parcels.

The Administration's family sanctions are particularly mistaken today, because they unreasonably limit a source of direct, effective aid for millions of Cubans who have suffered the damages of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. These sanctions are so severe that, to take one example, they make it illegal for a Miami man to send a parcel containing new clothes and vegetable seeds to a brother in Cuba who saw his home, garden, and possessions wiped out.

Sanctions such as these, targeted at needy individuals, are at odds with our humanitarian interests and family values, and they have no strategic benefit.

Congress would do well to suspend or repeal these sanctions so that Cuban Americans can join American immigrants from elsewhere in the Caribbean who today are extending a hand of charity to their families on other islands who weathered the same storms, and suffered the same damage, as our neighbors in Cuba.

THE TRAVEL BAN: A FOREIGN POLICY BLUNDER

Before turning to the specific question of family sanctions, I would like to argue that the overall U.S. travel ban is a major foreign policy mistake. It is completely at odds with policies that Administrations of both parties pursued with success toward the Soviet Union and the communist states of Eastern Europe.

At the heart of the policies that helped win the Cold War was a belief that American openness was an element of American strength.

That is why Administrations of both parties adhered to the Helsinki accords, which included commitments to free travel of citizens—a commitment we assumed knowing full well that the communist countries of the Eastern bloc might not comply, and the flow of travelers might only be from West to East.

Then, all the restrictions on travel across the Iron Curtain were imposed by the communist governments, and none by the democracies.

In contrast to those policies—and to the policies we pursue today with regard to communist China and Vietnam—our Cuba policy seems to be based on the idea that American openness is a liability to be regulated and controlled, rather than a strength to be deployed.

If we were to end the travel ban as it applies to all Americans—thus heeding the call of Pope John Paul II, to “open the doors to Cuba”—we would realize several benefits for our foreign policy and humanitarian interests.

American universities, charities, churches, and citizens—left, right, and center—would be able freely to exchange information, ideas, and arguments with Cubans in and out of government. We would no longer rely only on government programs, government grantees, and government-licensed travelers to communicate with the Cuban people whom we want to influence.

An increase of American travelers would boost the incomes of average Cubans in the tourism industry and in private businesses, both legal and black market, improving their living standards and their independence. It would enable lots more Cubans to enter private business, such as the thousands that legally rent rooms to travelers from abroad.

An end to the travel ban would do away with the federal government licensing processes that require, for example, that an American that wants to donate Bibles or baseballs to a Cuban church, must obtain a license from one federal agency to travel, and a second license from another agency to “export” the donation.

And it would end the practice of regulating visits and acts of charity between Cuban Americans and their loved ones in Cuba.

The travel ban is part of an economic sanctions regime that the Bush Administration believed would bring about political change in Cuba. It has failed to do that during President Bush's two terms, it failed in the nearly two decades since Cuba suffered the loss of Soviet subsidies, and it has no prospect of doing so now.

It serves mainly as an embargo on American influence in Cuba, and today the Bush Administration's family sanctions serve as an embargo on American compassion toward hurricane victims in Cuba. Congress would be wise to examine this policy, and would be wiser still to end it.

HURRICANE DAMAGE AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The extent of damage and suffering caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in Cuba is still coming into focus, but its severity is not in doubt.

Cuban officials are reporting that 514,875 housing units were damaged, and of these, 91,254 were destroyed completely. In some towns in the eastern province of Holguin, where Ike made landfall, and in the western province of Pinar del Rio, which took the brunt of both storms, there are reports that more than three fourths of homes were damaged.

There is extensive damage to agriculture, both to food crops such as plantains, tubers, and vegetables, and to cash crops such as sugar, coffee, and tobacco. In addition, Cuban officials report that Ike damaged 4,000 tons of food stocks by blowing the roofs off of warehouses; this is in addition to 1,300 tons damaged by Gustav.

Roads, health clinics, the electrical grid, and other elements of Cuba's infrastructure have been damaged heavily by wind, rain, and flooding. As of September 12, Cuban authorities reported that three eastern provinces, Camaguey, Las Tunas and Holguin, had less than 30 percent of electrical service operating.

Seven deaths have been reported.

In sum, Cubans have suffered massive losses of food and shelter, many have lost the essentials of their livelihood, and the overall economy has been weakened considerably.

It is unclear how long it will take for Cuba to recover its ability to produce basic foodstuffs, to rebuild food reserves, and to resume other areas of production that yield the hard currency revenues that pay Cuba's food import bill and other essential expenses.

This is a time for governments to set politics aside and to allow aid to reach people in need.

The international community is responding. Russia, Spain, Brazil, and other countries have sent planeloads of aid. The European Union, China, Vietnam, Venezuela, and the United Nations have made commitments to aid Cuba, but at this time it is impossible to judge how this aid will measure up against Cuba's immediate and longer-term needs.

I applaud the Administration's offer to provide \$5 million in aid, through an airlift that would be mounted as soon as Cuba would give the green light. Cuba turned that offer down last weekend. Considering the extent of need in Cuba, and the fact that the U.S. offer came without preconditions, Cuba's rejection of this offer is particularly regrettable. Cuba can reasonably argue that U.S. embargo restrictions hamper its recovery effort, but it is astounding that Cuba would not accept U.S. aid now, even as it continues to press its case regarding the embargo.

THE IMPACT OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION FAMILY SANCTIONS

Cuba's needs are so great that they will only be addressed effectively by a large-scale effort, supported by international donors and relief agencies.

But the question this Subcommittee is considering is whether, even if an effective international assistance effort is put in place, U.S. law and regulation should block Cuban Americans from providing direct aid to family members in Cuba.

Since 2004, U.S. regulations have limited Cuban American family visits to once every three years; they have limited remittances to \$100 per household per month; and they restrict the content of gift parcels to food, medicine, medical supplies and equipment, receive-only radios, batteries for radios, and, since last June, cellular phones. (In 2004, the following items were dropped from the list of allowable contents of gift parcels: clothing, personal hygiene items, seeds, fishing equipment, soap-making equipment, and veterinary medicine and supplies. The Federal Register notice explained that gift parcels "decrease the burden on the Cuban regime to provide for the basic needs of its people.")

The Administration also determined that visits, remittances, and parcels may go to immediate family only, so that cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, and more distant relatives are excluded.

How does this affect the situation today?

It means that a Cuban American who visited his mother last year in Holguin and wants to locate her now and look after her, can't do so because his visit was too recent, and he has to wait until 2010 to visit her again.

It means that a woman in New Jersey who has heard from her brother in Ciego de Avila that his house is intact but his refrigerator was destroyed by flooding, cannot send the money to buy a new one, because it would exceed the limit on remittances.

It means that in the case of a family in Pinar del Rio whose house was flattened and garden wrecked, their relatives cannot send seeds and new clothes, because since 2004 those items cannot legally be sent in gift parcels.

It means that two men in Hialeah who want to draw on their savings to go to Cuba immediately, buy supplies however they can, and put a new roof on their aunt's house, cannot do so. The aunt is not immediate family, and the visit is not allowed.

These are hypothetical examples, but given the devastation in Cuba and the extent of family ties to the United States, situations like this surely exist.

We should acknowledge that if the U.S. government were to suspend the family sanctions through executive or legislative action, direct family aid might only reach a small portion of the families in need in Cuba today.

But we can be sure that such aid would make a world of difference for those families. They would be able to resolve the lion's share of their needs, and their good fortune would in turn reduce the burden on the relief agencies that are the only option for everyone else.

Why would America stand in the way of that?

One might argue that our sanctions should not be abandoned because they are an expression of solidarity with Cuba's dissidents. But the opposite is true; Cuban dissidents want the sanctions suspended. Dissident leaders Martha Beatriz Roque and Vladimiro Roca wrote President Bush to ask that he ease U.S. regulations so families can freely help relatives harmed by Hurricane Gustav. They wrote on behalf of the group, "Agenda para la Transición." "You know as well as we do that any family member abroad would like to have physical contact with those who are going through a difficult situation," they said. "We ask that you, at least, for a period of two months, lift the embargo restrictions that have to do with relations between Cubans in exile and those that live on the island, regarding remittances, gift parcels, and trips." Other dissidents, including Oswaldo Paya, on behalf of the Christian Liberation Movement, and Oscar Espinosa Chepe, have made similar appeals. President Bush has turned them down.

Second, one might argue that, in the case of remittances, Cubans have no place to spend their money. This is patently untrue. The Cuban government operates hard currency retail outlets and some stores that accept domestic currency, where appliances and home repair supplies are sold. Moreover, the black market is a basic fact of economic life in Cuba, and Cubans use it every day to obtain goods and services. The idea that a Cuban, especially in emergency circumstances, would be indifferent to an increase in hard currency purchasing power is absurd.

Finally, one might argue that the family sanctions are part of a set of measures that are going to put decisive pressure on the Havana government to change its ways. This has not been the case since Cuba lost its Soviet subsidies nearly two decades ago, even though our sanctions were tightened by law in 1992 and 1996, and by regulatory actions under President Bush.

Surely no American would wish today to see Cuba plunge into a humanitarian crisis, in the hope that acute suffering would somehow force the Cuban people to act. The likely result would not be political change, but a Florida Straits migration crisis that would be our crisis too. I am confident that the Bush Administration's aid offers are motivated both by humanitarianism and by the risks that accrue if disaster relief is not provided.

Mr. Chairman, by repealing or suspending the family sanctions, Congress would not be pre-judging any future debate on our overall policies toward Cuba.

But Congress would be sending a signal, in tandem with the Administration's offers of aid, that it is not just countries such as Russia, Venezuela, and China that stand with the Cuban people at a time of dire need. We would show that the United States, along with many democratic friends in this hemisphere and Europe, has put politics aside to open all effective channels of aid. We would show a willingness to adapt our Cuba policies rather than hold them sacrosanct. We would show that, beyond extolling the virtues of Cuba's dissidents and spending millions to support

their cause, we are willing to listen to them and accept their advice. And we would not for a minute forfeit our ability to resume our political debate with Cuba's government once the goal of assisting Cuba's hurricane victims has been accomplished.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Well, thank you all for your testimony. Again the buzzer has rung. We have a series of four votes which would most likely implicate 45 minutes to 1 hour, but I am going to ask all of you to stay because we would like to propose questions to you.

Let me begin with a question and you can all reflect on it, and I want to read it into the record because it is a *El Nuevo Herald* endorsement of an amendment that is being proposed by Senator Dodd, who I am sure is familiar to most of you, and I am reading this:

"The proposal of Democratic Senator Christopher Dodd to lift for 6 months the principal restrictions on remittances and travel to Cuba, among others, has the virtue of wisdom and the force of compassion. Seconded by a Republican colleague, Richard Lugar, it gives a glimmer of hope. The Cuban authorities have been insisting on linking the unilateral and total lifting of the entire embargo to any willingness to receive aid. In this way they make all the people suffer as a tool of urging political blackmail. Nevertheless, the circumstances allow Washington to look at things from another level and work with an ample margin to maneuver in normal times restrictions imposed by the administration of George W. Bush that are extremely unpopular on the island, and for exiles. Now they offend intelligence and sensitivity. That absurd strategy does not benefit North American interests nor does it speed up the return of freedom to Cuba. The Cubans of the island are hoping for the help of the United States. If the cost of saving lives and alleviate suffering consists of lifting the embargo for 6 months, well, it is worth the pain and we will pay the price. That is the ethical fiber that differentiates us from the Castro brothers' dictatorship. Free men do not make policy with other peoples' pain."

So when we return I am sure that your response will be illuminating, interesting—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I yield to my friend.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Chairman, we still have a few more minutes. It is about 7 minutes before which means we have got about 3 or 4 minutes left. Just to put into the discussions so when we return, I have yet to hear people advocating that we just temporarily lift the restrictions on humanitarian aid in order to deal with the current crisis. What we are really talking about here is a major change of policy and not a humanitarian, let us just lift the restrictions now because of the hurricane and the natural disaster.

That might actually be a little bit more, you know, attractive to us because we would be then—

Mr. PETERS. I would support that.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. I would certainly support that.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes. Unfortunately, that is not what is being advocated today. What is being advocated is a major change in policy, and what we are doing is letting a crisis define what long-term policy should be which is not the way we are supposed to be—

Mr. DELAHUNT. Would my friend yield for just a moment?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Sure. Sure.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Because I take his point and he knows my position as I think everyone on the panel does. I indicated in my opening remarks, and I thought you were paying attention to me, but what I suggested, and it is my intention to file a 6-month suspension, and my proposal would not go as far as the amendment put forth by Senator Dodd, but would simply for 6 months go back to the pre-2004 regime, if you will, that would allow Cuban-Americans to travel and to bring remittances along with maybe toothpaste and some bedding home to their loved ones, and I would be more than welcome to have you as the lead Republican sponsor on that humanitarian initiative, but maybe you should have a discussion on the floor of the House as we go to vote with some others, otherwise you might be the target of some criticism.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. The other fundamental that we need to get at and asking for something that is temporary as far different than changing policy, fundamental policy. The other aspect is we, of course, have seen nobody suggesting that, yes, let us make an offer. We will do this. We will change this policy if we can eliminate certain political restrictions that Castro on his own people. Let us take a look at specific policies that are in Cuba that are repressive and repugnant to us and say, good, let us cut a deal here. Let us lift this if you do this. Instead, I think what we have got is unilateral concessions that does not lead to any type of respect by a dictatorial regime like that in Cuba. Maybe we can discuss all of this when we get back.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I look forward to the discussion. It is a dialogue. We stand in recess.

[Recess.]

Mr. DELAHUNT. We are back. I appreciate your patience and my good friend from California has other obligations so he will proceed first.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and let me note this is our last hearing probably, probably our last hearing. Maybe not, but who knows.

Mr. DELAHUNT. We have some surprises.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. He has got some surprises up his sleeve, but if this is indeed the last hearing of the year, we have had a—you know, the Bill and Dana show has been quite an experience for us both, and we have had a lot of fun, but we have really broken a lot of new ground intellectually because we have been open-minded to having extensive and thorough involvement in questions and answers and exchanges of ideas, which is different than many of the other subcommittees that I have been on. So I have learned a lot this year, and—

Mr. DELAHUNT. If I can interrupt as I always do. I want to thank you, Dana. This is the fiftieth hearing of this particular subcommittee. I believe we have had more hearings than all of the other subcommittees combined, and it has been informative, it has been fun, and it has been an intellectual challenge, and it would not have been that way but for the fact that you are the ranking member of the subcommittee.

I hope that as the next Congress assembles that you still are the ranking member and I am the chairman, but I am grateful for your courtesies, your ability to work well with your Democratic colleagues. I hope I am not giving you a heavy load by praising you, but it is not hyperbole. It is from the heart. You are my friend. We disagree on a lot, but we do it with respect, we do it with civility, and on occasion we agree, and when we do, watch out.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, with that said I think that we actually agree on more than we thought we did at the beginning of the year, and I have been very pleased with those areas which, for example, with Ramos and Compean, we agreed to look into that issue, which is very important to me, and several other issues that you have backed me up in terms of my investigative endeavors into the Oklahoma City bombing, and things such as that. So I appreciate that very much, Mr. Chairman.

Finally, a couple words on this, and then I am sorry, I have to run upstairs. I have got a—actually it is an interview on The Uighurs, which is something we agree on, but we did not know we agreed until we had those hearings.

So let me just say that we have had a number of hearings on Cuba. We have had eight hearings on Cuba so far this year. Unfortunately, seven of them were about Guantanamo, and one was this hearing about this particular issue. I think that it would have served us well if we would have had, and if next year we decide to move forward, and you resubmit your legislation, we should begin with hearings on human rights in Cuba, and how that relates to basic fundamental policy, and there is a relation to fundamental policies, and where you draw the line between a humanitarian, very humanitarian instinct that we all have and caring for people as individuals, and also the responsibility of developing a policy that will make all people better in the long run is a tough—it is a tough job to know where to draw that line.

So today I would just simply say that while I sympathize with the people who have talked about their relatives not being to see each other, I blame Castro and I blame the dictatorship for that. I think that when people came here they understood that I am going to be separated from my family, and they were willing to do that to get away from this monstrous regime, and then after a few years of feeling the heart's pain, then to expect the United States to change is not necessarily the right way to go.

What we should be looking for is regime change in Havana and hopefully there will be now that Castro is on his way out. I would also recommend that we get fully behind the humanitarian effort for hurricane assistance, and I understand the NGOs now are capable of collecting money, any amounts of money and going into Cuba to help. If there is any restriction on that, we should be behind that effort.

Finally, with Cuba, suffering as it is, I think we need to call upon Fidel Castro to give up some of the hundreds of millions of dollars he has ripped off from his own people and amassed in foreign banks as has happened for the last 50 years, maybe he can give some of that money to help his suffering people at this moment, and I would challenge him to do so.

With that said, Mr. Chairman, I have got to go up and do this interview. Thank you all very much. God bless you.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you, Dana, and let me go first to the other Republican. I feel like I am at a Republican convention.

Mr. FLAKE. We would let you know if you were.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I know. I have no doubt about it. Jeff.

Mr. FLAKE. Thank you. I appreciate the testimony, and really appreciate the indulgence while we traipsed back and forth to the Floor. I know you have waited a long time and just want you to know how much we appreciate it, all of you.

Let me just say I have enjoyed all of the testimony. I just had a question. Ms. Iriondo, is that how it is pronounced, and Ms. Pérez Castellón or however you pronounce that. I think I heard you loud and clear that you believe that travel, that you would not want to travel to Cuba because that would somehow aid the regime or send the wrong message, and I understand that, and I appreciate that, and I would be the last in a world, I do not think anybody should force you to do so.

By the same token, do you think that it should be your right or our right as Members of Congress to tell Dr. Hernández or Ms. Arzola or somebody else who has family there, who has a sick mother there, that it is not their right to travel?

Ms. IRIONDO. Can I respond?

Mr. FLAKE. Please do.

Ms. IRIONDO. If I may, for example, Blanca González, who is the mother of a current political prisoner sentenced to 25 years, is not permitted by the Castro regime to visit her son, her granddaughter, or her daughter-in-law because whoever gets into Cuba is a selective process, and all those that dissent from the regime are not allowed to go into Cuba.

Now, I have heard some things, and if I may, I am going to use your question, and if you allow me, I would like to clarify some things I have heard in a testimony given here that I think that needs clarification for the record.

For a long time now, in addition to what is available now in response to the devastating hurricanes that have impacted the island of Cuba, there have been nongovernmental organizations fully licensed by the Department of the Treasury to send remittances to independent civil society in Cuba for the promotion of independent civil society, and also to all the families of political prisoners in Cuba. That we know of, there are approximately 300 political prisoners, and I say that we know of because the figures are given by Castro's regime, and we know for a fact that without any other entity to dispute the official numbers given by the regime it is very difficult to assess the real number of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience within Cuba.

Mr. FLAKE. If I may—

Ms. IRIONDO. But one of those organizations, and I have the privilege of working with it, is an organization that is called Plant-ed until Freedom and Democracy, and this is an organization, an NGO, integrated by former political prisoners who never wavered in front of the regime, who spent more than 20 years, each of them, in prison, and who would rather be naked than wear the common

prisoner's uniform in Castro's prisons. And every month they send \$50 to every family of every political prisoner within the island.

At the same time we had also a licensed organization and we did not renew it because we do not have employees, we are all volunteers, so we work through Plantados hasta la Libertad y la Democracia (Planted until Liberty and Freedom) and we send—

Mr. FLAKE. Right.

Ms. IRIONDO [continuing]. Our remittances through that organization, but members of the opposition inside Cuba also, and members of the independent civil society, groups of the independent civil societies. There are many organizations and NGOs that are taking care also of sending these resources for the independent civil society within Cuba. This is nothing new. This has been going on for a long time.

And the last thing I wanted to ask, and with all due respect, Congressman Delahunt and Congressman Flake, in all your visits with the government authorities in Cuba, with the regime, how many times have you been able to visit a political prisoner inside a prison, or publicly asked for the liberation of those political prisoners who at this moment need to be a very, a very serious concern for all freedom-loving people?

Mr. FLAKE. Thank you for your statement. Let me just say every time that I have traveled to Cuba and every meeting that we have had, we have presented a list of political prisoners and asked for their release as well as many letters having been sent from here as well, so we have made that, but that is all beside the point, as was the response.

Let me ask again and maybe Ms. Pérez Castellón will answer. I know how you feel, and I feel that it is your right certainly. If you do not want to travel to Cuba to visit relatives or to give aid and comfort to those who are hurting or whatever, you should be able to stay where you are and not travel, and I understand that not everyone can see their relatives. The gentlelady with a son in prison, my heart goes out to you. But does that mean that nobody should be able to visit their family? Should you have the right—should we have the right as Members of Congress to say to Ms. Arzola, to say you cannot therefore visit your sick mother?

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. Well, first of all, the Cuban Government has said they will not allow me to return to my own country so that takes care of that.

My husband was in prison for 28 years. None of his family was allowed to go visit. But when we are here to talk about the sanctions that were imposed in 2003, to 75 political prisoners, I did not hear Oscar Espinosa Chepe say or Hector Palacios when they were in prison “lift those sanctions” because they knew that those sanctions meant something.

I would also like to say that what I have heard here is lift sanctions, lift sanctions. I have not once heard anyone say let the Cuban Government take the first step, whether it be the release of prisoners, whether it be anything, and with all due respect, what I think you are doing is emboldening the victimizer, and you have no regard for the victims, and I have not heard Oscar Espinosa Chepe condemn Cuba's totalitarian regime. Yet when I read his columns in the Herald, one was let us give Raul Castro a chance.

Well, you know what, it has been 2 years. The Ladies in White have been dragged through the street. The prisons are still full. And the other column I heard was vote for Obama. So you know what? I do not think this makes him a member of the opposition, but rather someone who is being used by the regime to obtain their goals which is basically the lifting of sanctions.

Mr. FLAKE. Let me stipulate that you feel it is your right to tell another family that they cannot visit their family?

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. No, no. I believe that sanctions were imposed for a purpose.

Mr. FLAKE. Okay.

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. The arbitrary arrests of 75—

Mr. FLAKE. It should be our right then.

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN [continuing]. Men and women. Yes, I think it was okay for the racist south—Government of South Africa to be—you know, to have an embargo, and I think that is what made South Africa change, but for some reason in the case of Cuba, and it is not now because of the hurricane, it is the same people that year after year, and year after year I came here with Pepe Hernández precisely asking for those sanctions to remain, and all of a sudden we feel that those sanctions have to be lifted without one single step from the Cuban Government.

Mr. FLAKE. Let me ask Dr. Hernández and Mr. Peters quickly. The statement was made that if we allow travel or allow packages, that it would not benefit any Cuban families. But then in the next paragraph of the testimony there was a statement made that “this action would benefit the Cuban regime.”

Is it possible to send—you know, if we were able to send a hygiene kit or a fishing line or seeds to a family, that the family would not benefit but the regime somehow would?

Now I am the first to admit there is no way you can keep all that you send to families, you can stipulate that none of it will go to the regime or whatever, but it seems a little simplistic, Mr. Sosa may want to address this as well, to say that you cannot benefit your family members by visiting or anything else, but that same visit or that same shipment or that same aid will benefit the regime. Dr. Hernández.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Hit the microphone.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. Sorry.

Mr. DELAHUNT. And before you have an opportunity, let me introduce this rather famous individual by the name of Dan Burton, who I happen to have to admit is a friend of mine as well.

Mr. BURTON. I like to be a friend of the Cuban people.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Well, you are a friend of the Cuban people.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. And I have a very, very great honor to be here with whom I consider a very personal friend also, Dan Burton.

Look, we have been here for at least 3 or 4 hours going back and forth on this matter, and I tried to explain from where we come from, from our position. I mean, and Mr. Burton knows this very well because both the Torricelli bill and the Helms-Burton bill, you know, we fought at least as much as anybody else to try to pass it with our community and certainly here in Congress.

But this is not about that. This is not about sanctions at this moment, and I said it in my testimony. This is about helping the

Cuban people at probably the worst time that they have confronted in a long, very, very long time. After 50 years of having the worst government that anybody could ever expect, we are having two hurricanes that have destroyed completely the island.

I have to say this but I am afraid and I am extremely concerned that we may be looking at the disintegration of the Cuban family and the Cuban nation as we know it. If we cannot hold at this time the Cuban people to their land, we are going to have to find a way for them here in the United States because nobody is going to stay in Cuba under the present conditions, and yes, yes, I would do anything in my hands to get rid of Castro, Raul Castro. I would do anything and they do not deserve anything whatsoever. But right now we have to save the Cuban people, and it is not going to be saved by simply scratching our head and waiting for Raul Castro to give us what we are asking of him. They are not going to accept what we have offered. They are not going to do anything to help the Cuban people. We have to help them, and then it is not a question of coming here and discussing whether this is right or this is wrong, or we should not, and there are people that do not want to be helped. This is a question that we have to now break the rules if they can be broken, and help the Cuban people.

What we are asking is not to lift the embargo or anything like that, not to smash the Cuban Government. I would never do that. But what we are saying is that the Cuban people are suffering tremendously, and what worked before should not work now. We have to help, and the way we can help is just the tremendous resources of our own people here. They are prepared to do it.

I also have a license to help the Cuban opposition, and we are also sending money to the Cuban opposition, but what I referred to is that if you got—any of you wants to send monies to those 75 or 59 that remain, or their families, you cannot do it because you have to have a license, and that is not fair, and it is not fair that I can have a license to send money to those people, and anybody here in the United States or their families, or their families cannot go there.

There are people that can visit Cuba every day, and they have a license to go there and take humanitarian relief, but their families cannot. The families of those people cannot, but then if the government gives a license to somebody, then they can go there.

What I am saying is let everybody do it because this is a time of crisis.

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. Excuse me, sir. We have a plane to catch and we are going to have to leave, but we do appreciate your having invited us here today, and again I do not see how family travel can make up for not pressuring the government to accept—

Mr. DELAHUNT. I appreciate what you are saying, and I am going to go to my friend Mr. Burton who wants to make a few comments.

Mr. BURTON. I know you have to catch a plane.

Mr. DELAHUNT. But before he goes on, I think it is important because you made a statement about Oscar and Hector. While they were in prison, their wives, Miriam Leiva, and Gisela Palacios, spoke out on this issue with great courage, and continued to advocate for the removal of restrictions on Cuban family travel. So I do not want anyone to leave here that might be watching this today

to think that at great risk to themselves, at great risk to their husbands who were incarcerated, as you well know, that they have altered, they are people of great principle. They deserve our respect, our admiration. I think that is important.

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. No doubt.

Mr. DELAHUNT. With that let me go to the gentleman from Indiana.

Mr. BURTON. I know you have to catch a plane and I will not ask any questions. I will just make a couple of observations.

First of all, I think as long as President Bush is in the White House, which is not for very much longer, you are not going to go see any movement to lift the sanctions. If Obama wins, there probably will be a movement. I have not talked to John McCain about it. I presume he would take the same position as President Bush.

But they are still driving 1950 something Chevrolets down there if they can find the parts for them, and the people that work in the hotels down there they cannot be there except while they work, and if they make \$400 a month, it goes to the government and the government pays them back in pesos, so they get about an equivalent of \$5–10 a month. None of that is changing.

And for us to show a weakness, in my opinion, and reward that will not change that government structure whatsoever.

I had problems with the embargo that we had on South Africa, but it did work, and I think that Cuba eventually will be free, eventually it will have democracy, and I hope to be around to see that, but I do not believe it is the right time.

I talked to some of the people who really wanted to change what is going on in Cuba. I said the minute they start allowing local democratic elections and start allowing people to be able to have a voice in their government, then I will start talking about changing the Helms-Burton law, and I will be one of the people that lead that because that is what we want to see. We want to see a movement to democracy and freedom. But until that happens I will continue to try to help you guys out and try to make sure that we keep the pressure on Fidel and Raul, and I hope Fidel lives long enough to see democracy come to Cuba. I would hate to see him go before it happens.

Thank you very much.

Ms. PÉREZ CASTELLÓN. Thank you, Congressman.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Before you two leave, my colleague from New York wishes to either pose a question or make a statement. This is Congressman Gregory Meeks.

Mr. MEEKS. I have to jump in because of some of the comments that were made. Number one, I think that the point that my dear friend and colleague Mr. Burton made that nothing has changed is exactly right. Nothing has changed. And as long as we keep doing the same thing nothing will change.

So if in fact we have been doing something for 48 years and we have not changed anything, and nothing has made it better for the Cuban people, then common sense would tell me that we need to change. We need to do something differently, number one.

Number two, there has been reference made a number of times about South Africa, and I hear that a number of times. Well, there are some very real differences, I think, in Cuba and South Africa.

One let me point out. First of all, that in South Africa it was not unilateral sanctions, it was multilateral sanctions, and you had the whole rest of the world that was a part of it, and that is what helped make the kind of change that was necessary that happened there. That is not the case that has taken place in Cuba because others are there.

Number two, on the specific issue that we are talking about, even during the sanction period in South Africa families were allowed to go visit families. Families were allowed to take care of families. Families were allowed to bring and give money to help out their people even during the sanctions in South Africa. There was not that kind of travel ban.

And what happened was people had a choice to make whether or not they wanted to go visit South Africa. For example, many African-Americans chose not to go visit South Africa because they thought that to sit in a segregated park would not be right, but it was their choice, but others were not denied and family members were not denied the right to go visit as is happening here, so that is a different scenario.

Secondly, I, too, want freedom and democracy for the people of Cuba, and no one knows more about that than I think that I do, and actually people who happen to be of African descent in the United States of America because we too know how it is to be deprived of a democracy in a "democracy." So it was for a long period of time in the South where African-Americans did not have the right to vote, did not have the right—they were limited, to me, in a very real way as some of the Cubans are in Cuba.

But how did it change? It changed when people went down and was able to open it up, to expose what was going on, to show what was going on, to talk about what was going on. It gave a real presence and forced people who wanted to keep everybody else out. If you look at the governors in the South during segregation in America, what they wanted to do was restrict people from coming into them telling them what to do. They wanted to leave them out, and we were fighting to get people in so that it could be exposed so that we could have change, otherwise if that had not happened we could be now some 45 years after the Voting Rights Act in 1965 in the same condition that we were then, just as Cuba some 48 years later is in the same condition that it was in because we stubbornly moved with the same policy, and refused to change so that we can benefit the majority of the Cuban people.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I want to give—you can stay, you are staying, and I know you two have a plane so I am going to conclude the two of you with Ms. Iriondo.

Ms. IRIONDO. I would like to thank you for your consideration, and before I go I would like to say and reiterate that we are as concerned for the people of Cuba in this moment as anybody can be because we want the best for our people; but we want the best for 11 million Cubans, not for those only that have family members, and that is what we are thriving for.

If the case can be argued by some of the people that have expressed a different position to that we have expressed, then, too, the case can be argued that it is a unique opportunity to exert the kind of international pressure starting with all of us here to ask

and demand from the Cuban Government and from the regime to make and take the steps, at least one step, liberate the political prisoners, do something. The case can be argued, and I believe if that case is argued with the confluence of all of us in the strength of our unity, I believe we are going to see real change, and that is the change I want.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I want to assure you that every time that I go to Cuba I argue and advocate exactly what you want. In 1988, I went personally to The Combinado del Este, and interviewed Los Atentados, and came back and filed a report and urged the Cuban Government to release them, and as you know, because in 1989 they were released. I am not taking any credit for that, but I can assure you and those that have been incarcerated in Cuba have our support and we have advocated for them publicly and with the Cuban Government officials. Be assured of that.

I am not in any way questioning the sincerity of what you are saying, and I think if we had more time and could have a conversation in an informal setting, I think you would be surprised by the level of agreement. Bon voyage.

Ms. IRIONDO. Thank you very much.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Peters.

Mr. PETERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to begin by saying that I was very heartened to hear what Mr. Rohrabacher said; that after a number of hearings on Guantánamo and then this one, that he would like to continue, and I hope that the subcommittee will plow ahead. I think that the strategy that the United States has employed toward Cuba is underexamined, and deserves to be examined because we—well, let me put it this way—I do not think it is a matter of strength or weakness. If I am playing chess with Mr. Hernández here and after say 48 years I realize I am not winning the game and I decide to change my strategy, that is not a concession to him. That is my effort to do something slightly smarter.

And I think that if we look at what we have done over the years, we have imagined in our own mind that our sanctions are really tough because they are extreme in our context, and we imagine in our own minds that this regime is going to fall, but it is actually the Communists are much smarter there than we imagined them to be. The regime, whether we like it or not, is more solid than we imagine it to be. Our sanctions are ineffectual, and so I encourage you to plow ahead and examine the strategy itself.

Congressman Flake asked if aid can get to the people, and I think there is no doubt that it can. The Cuban-Americans would not send remittances over the years if they were just going into the ether. They get to their people, and the Congressman's point is extremely well taken. It is a Communist country after all; the state is the dominant factor in the economy.

So as the money moves through the economy, yes, some gets into the hands of the state, but you can send remittances and in this context let me just stop for a second. This hearing is not about grand strategy. This hearing is about what we do specifically now in a time of humanitarian emergency, and whether we are going to hold all these sanctions as if they are holy writ and cannot be touched or whether we might adjust in some ways.

What in the world would be wrong with allowing somebody to send remittances so that their aunt can buy a refrigerator that has been destroyed by a flood or a mattress for that matter? Why do we have to hold as if it is holy writ to these sanctions that say that if I have got my mom in Cuba I cannot send her new clothes in a gift package? I cannot send seeds. These are absurd in today's contents.

Mr. DELAHUNT. You cannot.

Mr. PETERS. No, you certainly cannot.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. You cannot.

Mr. PETERS. Or, for that matter, if somebody's roof has sustained damage, and one wants to go and bring \$500 to repair it, you cannot do that because that is too much money.

So you look at these sanctions in the light of the needs that are there now, and they are absurd. And if you suspend them, that does not prejudice at all your ability to take a bigger look at the policy on a permanent basis, but it will help a lot of people.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Let me, before you conclude your remarks, and I am going to get to Mr. Sosa, we are here for the duration, so we will make sure that we keep Dan Burton here until it gets painful for him.

But would you expand, Mr. Peters, on in terms of what can be sent by family members from this country in terms of humanitarian aid? Can I send toothpaste or toilet paper if I was—

Mr. PETERS. No.

Mr. DELAHUNT. No?

Mr. PETERS. No.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I want that to go on the record. What we are talking about—go ahead, Dan.

Mr. BURTON. What constitutes humanitarian aid? Let us hear your definition of it.

Mr. FLAKE. While he is waiting to speak, I do not think it is his definition that matters. It is the Bush administration's definition, and he is about to read it from the Federal Regs, and we have tried actually over the years to expand it and have been unsuccessful.

Mr. PETERS. When I refer to the family sanctions, Mr. Chairman, what I am referring to is on the issue of visits, a limitation of once every 3 years without any provision for exception. When it comes to sending money to your family, \$100 per household per month is the limit. And when it comes to gift parcels, since 2004, what is permitted is for someone to send to their family food, medicine, medical supplies and equipment, receive-only radios, batteries for radios, and then last year cell phones are allowed to be sold.

In 2004, President Bush deleted the following items from what was allowed to be sold so that it is not legal to send clothing, personal hygiene items as you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, seeds, fishing equipment, soap-making equipment, veterinary medicine and supplies.

Then, finally, in the case of all of those things since 2004 the administration restricted, rather constricted the definition of family so that visits, packages and cash assistance can only be sent to immediate family and not to cousins or aunts and uncles or nephews. That is what we are complaining about.

Mr. FLAKE. Can I interject here? When you are talking about holy writ, that really rings a bell here because in 2003, and few people recognize this, the Bush administration actually liberalized, you know, who is family. Moved it from one degree of relationship, or from two to three. So for all those who say that we are somehow conceding and that that would send the wrong signal, we have done it back and forth. It is not holy writ. So we liberalized it in 2003, and then restricted it further in 2004.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Sosa.

Mr. SOSA. Thank you very much, Chairman Delahunt.

A couple of things come to mind. One is, for example, Dan Fisk, who is the National Security Advisor on the Western Hemisphere for the Bush administration, in the year 2000 wrote an article that I have here on the Washington Quarterly calling for the lifting of travel restrictions for Cuban-Americans, and remittances. So why was it okay then and not okay now?

Secondly, one thing that is incredible to me and you know, having grown up in the, "Your Honor I have a good sense of common sense," and what works and what does not work, and here we are having a discussion that we could have had every one of the past 47 years, and the arguments that I hear always on the other side of keeping the status quo is just hold on because inevitably it will change. And I suppose a broken clock is right twice a day. In this case the clock has been broken for 47 years. How much longer is this going to last?

In the meantime, we are not only isolating Cuban families, we are isolating the United States. The United States has created a vacuum in Cuba that is only very evidently now being filled by the Russian Federation, and the Bolivarian Republic of Hugo Chavez. Venezuela sends \$3 billion a year in annual subsidies and so here we are sending \$1 billion in aid to Georgia to stop the Russians, and 90 miles from Key West the Russians are here, and we do nothing. So we have created this vacuum that is not only bad for the Cuban people, it is bad for the United States of America.

So, you know, I think it is great that we are all discussing the effects on the people of Cuba, but what about the effects on the United States and our foreign policy, and what is going to happen if we have a state, as we very evidently do now, 90 miles from our shores that could eventually turn into a failed state as a result of these hurricanes? And it is just—you know, at some point you have just got to stop knocking your head against the wall and say, okay, this does not work, let us try something new.

What we are saying here, not only myself on the Cuba Study Group, but also the Cuban American National Foundation, and others who in the past have been much more shall I say a hard line, it is time to forget about the politics of the situation, inject the moral imperative into the equation. The hurricane has provided us with a fantastic opening to help the Cuban people help themselves and to further the interest of the United States by not creating so close to our shores a failed state which is in debt to Venezuela and potentially Russia.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you.

Mr. SOSA. Thank you.

Mr. DELAHUNT. And I am going to go to Dr. Hernández. I want to say something publicly. You and I do not agree on practically anything, and I know——

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. I agree with you that we do not agree.

Mr. DELAHUNT. So I do not want to give you a curse of having Delahunt saying good things about you. But having said that, I know that it was difficult for you to take the stance that you have. I consider it an act of courage because it is difficult to break out of the old thinking and look forward and envision a new strategy, or the beginning of a new strategy that will lead to something that I think we all can agree on, and I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that and let you know that despite the agreements and despite the criticism that you have occasionally uttered about myself, I have great respect for this act of courage that you have demonstrated.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and you can be sure that I also have a great respect, and all that criticism has been done with a respect that I have for your position and also for your person because I believe that you believe in your principles when you are saying that.

You mentioned that it takes courage to change, and I do not think that I have changed at all in my principles and my view of what the Cuban regime is all about. I continue to believe that this is one of the worst, one of the worst regimes or system that has ever been suffered by any country in this hemisphere, and I am going to use the opportunity that Mr. Burton is here with us, to tell you why I personally have changed also in my opinion a little bit, and somewhat.

And it is that, first, we believe that we here in the United States—we, the U.S. Government and also the exiled community—what is going to be the driving force to exact change from the Cuban Government in the island, and our position here and the things that we did and the things that we—the activities that we carried here in the United States, we are going to have a tremendous effect on the Cuban people.

When Congressman Burton and Senator Helms were working on the Helms-Burton bill, we saw a great opportunity to present, as we did also back in the Torricelli bill, a sort of sticks and carrot approach to the situation, and people that criticized tremendously the Helms-Burton bill has never talked about the fact that Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of the Helms-Burton bill say clearly what the United States is prepared to do if there is a reply, if there are conditions in Cuba that merits a change like Mr. Burton has said.

Well, there has never been anything that the Cuban Government has done in order to propitiate that change, and I can say here now that we can wait until hell freezes over and neither Raul nor Fidel Castro or any other people around them are going to do anything to move from where they are.

So what do we do here? We stay calm, cross our hands, and wait for things to happen, or like the Bush administration is saying, well, these are the three conditions. If you do these three conditions, we are going to move. Well, I can tell you right now that they are not going to release the prisoners, they are not going to call for free elections, and they are not going to do anything to respect

human rights in Cuba because that is their nature and if they change any of these things they are going to lose control. So what do we do in that condition?

In addition to that, we gave the—Congress gave in the Helms-Burton bill the President the opportunity to really exercise some pressure over the Cuban Government in Chapter 3 and the Congress gave a waiver on Chapter 3 of the Helms-Burton bill.

Well, the President, this President, my President because I am a Republican, which he agreed and promised us before he was elected that he was going to apply Chapter 3 of the Helms-Burton bill. He has signed a waiver for all the time that he has been here, so we do not have any pressure whatsoever on the Cuban people—on the Cuban Government.

Moreover, Chapter 4 actually says that if somebody in Cuba, and a foreign corporation is dealing with asset, confiscated assets in Cuba, their executive will not be given visas to come to the United States. Well, it has been exercised, I believe, in one or two occasions, but that has not been complied with.

What has happened? The work, the tremendous work that you did, Mr. Burton, on the Helms-Burton bill, it has been lost because no pressure whatsoever has been applied on the Cuban Government, and what I say now is that this pressure is not going to work with these people because they know that their lives go on it, so they cannot and they will not change. What will change is that if we are capable of empowering the Cuban people to get independence from the Cuban Government, to be able to work and act by themselves, to get confidence in themselves, to get confidence that they are going to be helped here in the United States, that there are people here, that we are their friends, the friends of the Cuban people, not the friends of the Cuban Government, and this is why we need to lift these restrictions at the present time because they go directly to the Cuban people, and those in there now are going to say they want to help us, they do not want to help the Cuban Government.

This is why it is so important at the present time that we lift, at least for 6 months, but we lift that so that the Cuban people knows that in their very worst moment we were there to help them, and we did not wait for the Cuban Government to act because they know. Down in Cuba they know that the Cuban Government is not going to help them, so we need to tell them we are going to help you directly because the Cuban Government is not going to help you.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Sosa, for the benefit of Mr. Burton, can you describe your own family's history, and then if you could care to comment on what Dr. Hernández just said?

Mr. SOSA. Yes, thank you very much, Chairman Delahunt.

I was born in Cuba, left when I was four. I had a father, brother, three cousins and an uncle imprisoned at Fidel Castro's jails. You know, I have been to Cuba three times on humanitarian missions. I think I may be the only one here who is a Cuban-American who has actually been to Cuba, talked to Cubans, and heard what they have to say as opposed to think what they are saying.

I am Republican. I am a supporter of President Bush, also a voter like Dr. Hernández. So I am not here as some wild-eyed liberal, despite living in Boston, Massachusetts.

But I agree with what Dr. Hernández says. I think the thing that is troubling here is the United States never seems to take the initiative. It always seems to react. You know, something happens on the island, we react to it whether it is the imprisoning of 75 dissidents or the hurricane or you can name a bunch of different things.

We never seem to be able to put the Castro regime on the defensive. It is time. We have an opportunity right now. The first thing we need to do, what Dr. Hernández said, is we need to lift these restrictions on travel and remittances for a minimum of 60 days, or 6 months, just a minimum of time to allow people to help themselves. This is not a question of how much money can the United States taxpayer fork over to Cuba. It is a question of one family helping the other. That is the first thing we need to do, but we need to put the Government of Cuba on the defensive.

Yes, that is going to involve some unilateral steps that we will need to take, but so what?

Mr. BURTON. May I ask you a question?

Mr. SOSA. Yes.

Mr. BURTON. When people work at the hotels down there and they get money, the money is paid to the government and the government pays them back in pesos. What guarantee is there that if we had a 6-month lifting of that so there was travel, and we allowed those monies to go down there in whatever amounts necessary, what guarantee is there that the same thing will not happen and that money will be converted to pesos, which is worth virtually nothing down there, people working for \$5 or \$10 a month, and we send the money down there, say thousands of dollars?

Let us say a family goes down there and takes \$5,000 or \$1,000 down there, and they are forced to give that to the government in exchange for pesos. What you are doing is you are helping fund the Castro government by giving them hard currency and they are turning it around and giving it back to people in pesos.

Mr. SOSA. Okay.

Mr. BURTON. I mean, that is one of the concerns we talk about.

Mr. SOSA. Sure, and I understand that concern. A couple of things. One is the absence of Cuban-Americans visiting Cuba in the last 4 years, and that vacuum in money has been filled very nicely by Venezuela. So there is always somebody there to come in and fill that vacuum, number one.

Number two, I think that if we were to lift family travel and remittances right now, I really doubt that there is going to be very much Cuban-Americans who are going there right now to stay at a hotel in Varadero. They are going to go stay with their relatives to help them build a roof with cement and all this other stuff.

There is no question that a dollar floating around from a Cuban-American on the island of Cuba is a dollar that benefits the Cuban economy. I mean, there is just no doubt about it. There is nothing in life that is 100 percent good. There is always some tradeoffs.

What we are saying here is that the tradeoff, first of all, that what we have been doing has not worked at all. We are still here

discussing the same regime that has been in power for almost 50 years, number one.

Number two, what we are saying is let us try something new. Let us have Cuban-Americans be on the front lines. Yes, I understand there may be a few extra dollars floating around in Cuba's treasury, but at the end of the day to have Cuban-Americans running around the island helping their families with their obvious success in the United States on a front to the Cuban Government's socialist policy, it is so obvious, you know, that it is worth paying that price, and that is what we are saying, I think, here, and what we are also saying is this is the right moment for change.

Mr. PETERS. May I respond to that, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. BURTON. Let me just make one more comment and then I will yield the floor. I am probably going to have to leave in a minute anyhow.

We have been and continue to be the top supplier of food to Cuba, and we are also one of the top suppliers of medical equipment as well, and during this hurricane, this tragedy that took place, we have offered humanitarian aid and other assistance, and they flatly rejected it.

So when it comes to really wanting to help the Cuban people during a crisis like this hurricane, America is there. America is there all over the world in places we do not like, and if they reject it there is not much we can do. But to lift the—I still have to be convinced, and I have not yet been convinced, that we ought to start making positive changes or negative changes in the Helms-Burton law until we see some kind of positive reaction or action on the island.

One small move toward democracy, one movement toward releasing political prisoners would change an awful lot of attitudes in this place, but there has been nothing, and I do not know whether you guys have read Armando Valladares' book.

Mr. SOSA. I have read it.

Mr. BURTON. And Armando has been a friend of mine I have not seen for awhile, but you know, I do not think that Armando is for lifting any kind of these bans, and he is the guy that spent 20 some years in that hell hole over there.

Mr. SOSA. Right. Well, I would say, first of all, that a very large group of Cuban dissidents disagree with the view you have just expressed, people who are actually now in the island either in prison or whatever. So that is the first thing I would say.

Secondly, we are not here to discuss American Government aid toward Cuba. I think that that is a subject for perhaps another committee meeting. We are here to talk about Cuban families helping themselves. That to me is the most basic American right there is. It is the right to choose where you want to travel and to whom you want to give aid to, and to have a Congress or a government deny one solitary island on the face of the earth the ability to have families see each other and receive aid to me makes no sense.

Why can I send money to North Korea, or where can I visit North Korea? But somehow Cuba seems to be different. This does not make any sense. I am sorry. It does not, and if you go outside of the Cuban-Americans community and you go all around this country, and you try to explain American policy toward Cuba to

people who do not have a vested interest in Cuba, they look at you like this is the craziest thing I ever heard. How did we get to this point?

So, you know, this is a moment of change, the hurricane has provided us with an opening. We need to take the initiative, and it would behoove us to do that.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. If I am allowed just to clarify something, Mr. Burton. We are not trying to change the Helms-Burton bill here. It does not have anything to do with the Helms-Burton bill. What we are trying to lift is the restrictions imposed by the Bush administration in 2004 that actually restricted first the travel of Cuban families to once every 3 years, and also that change the classification of families that can send monies to Cuba restricted only to parents and husbands or wives, and children, and this is what we believe that should be lifted at this time.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Peters.

Mr. PETERS. Congressman Burton, I agree with you and I think that having been here all day and listening to the testimony I think everyone agrees with you that the administration has made a good faith offer of aid to Cuba. The Cuban Government has rejected it, and that is very regrettable. I believe that I—I do not want to be pessimistic, so I hope that what we have seen so far is not the end of the story, and I hope our administration stays at it and finds a way to get the Cuban Government to accept the aid that we are offering in good faith, and I think it is also important to put on the record that some of the conditions that the United States put on the initial offer of aid have been dropped, so the administration is showing flexibility, and it is terrible that the Cubans have not accepted it.

With regard to the other point you made about the money, one of the problems that the Cubans perceive about their own economy is that everybody wants to work in tourism. It is true what you said about the hard currency and the peso. But if that was the whole story, Cubans would not want to work in tourism because they would make the same money there as they would make anywhere else, so why bother?

The fact is there is so much money that sloshes around the tourism sector, whether it is tips or whether it is the foreign company that gives some extra money on the side after the Rube Goldberg transaction that you described takes place, that is why they want to work there. That is why they want to work in foreign corporations, the joint ventures and all that, because after the transaction you describe takes place there is money paid on the side to these workers.

But that whole issue has nothing to do with the issue of people going to help their family. If somebody goes to help their family, and let us say Mr. Hernández would go and bring \$500 to his sister down there, you convert the \$500. In the Cuban economy there is the peso that you referred to and there is also a hard currency peso. It is a strange economy where two currencies circulate side by side. You convert the money. The Cuban Government takes its cuts, excessively I would say, but then that purchasing power goes to the sister, and it is used. So there is no doubt in my mind, I have never heard of a story—

Mr. DELAHUNT. If the gentleman would yield.

Mr. PETERS. Yes.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Just in terms of common sense I pose this to my friend from Indiana, would the Cuban-Americans here send remittances to their families on the island if it did not benefit the families? It just makes no sense. It just does not make any sense at all.

Now you can rant and rave and pound on your chest and say it is going to help Fidel Castro. No one in their right mind would be sending remittances back to the island unless it benefited their family. It just is common sense.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. I agree.

Mr. SOSA. One thing we have not talked about is the accountability of the Cuban Government. They will have to pay a price for turning down this aid, and again, I really have to insist on this point. We need to put them on the defensive. We need to say here is what we are willing to do. You want—you know, you want to make changes. You don't want to make changes. You are the one that will be held responsible when you do not rise to the occasion. But the United States is rising to the occasion, and you know, we cannot just always be responding to every crazy notion or opinion that Fidel Castro prints in Granma. I really think it is important, again, to take the initiative.

Mr. BURTON. Thank you all very much.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you, Dan. I guess this leaves me and I want to thank you, all of you, really for your patience as well as your endurance, and I think it is has been a very informative and enlightening and illuminating for members on both sides to hear this exchange and the diversity of opinion, by the way, that exists within the Cuban-Americans community that is so important to this country.

I, for one, have had an interest in this issue as you know Pepe, and you, Mr. Sosa, know that. I have great affection. I do not think our objectives are that different, we just have different ways to achieve them, and I believe that if we had no restrictions at all on travel, that Cuba would be a different place today.

There is an anecdote that I have related in the past. I told Fidel Castro that there would be another invasion, but this time it would be millions of Americans coming to visit the island, and that this time we would win. We had a very special group that we would send down, and that group was the kids on spring break, and he raised his hands and was willing to surrender.

I agree with both of you. I think there is an opportunity here beyond just doing the moral thing, the right thing, and respecting families, but maybe just creating, opening a window just a little to get people thinking in a different way, and you have all contributed during the course of this hearing today, and you have the gratitude of the committee, and thank you.

We will now adjourn.

[Whereupon, at 4:12 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

